CHAPTER 11

Children's Services Agencies

Article 1

Child Welfare Agencies

**SECTION 63-11-10. "Child welfare agency" defined.**

 Any agency, institution or family home engaged in the business of receiving children for care and maintenance, either part or full time, shall be classed as a child welfare agency.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-20. Exemptions.**

 (A) This article does not apply to:

 (1) child welfare agencies operating under the active supervision of a governing board representing an established religious denomination, except as these agencies voluntarily assume the obligations and acquire the rights provided by this article;

 (2) any children's home or institution to which state funds are appropriated;

 (3) the John de la Howe School in McCormick County; provided, that the board of trustees of that school may elect to be licensed by the department, in which case the board of trustees shall request, by resolution, the department to license the John de la Howe School. When a license has been issued to the John de la Howe School by the department, pursuant to this article, the school is bound by all regulations promulgated by the department relating to licensing standards and other matters pertaining to licensing standards;

 (4) rescue missions or other similar charitable institutions organized before May 8, 1959, for the purpose of providing temporary care and custody of children and other needy persons and operating under a local board of trustees pursuant to and authorized by law.

 (B) However, a foster care facility which does not receive state or federal financial assistance, operated by a local church congregation or established religious denomination or religious college or university must register with the department and report the number of children kept at the facility with the State Department of Social Services by January second of every year. These facilities must pass annual inspections by state or local authorities for compliance with the fire, health, and sanitation requirements.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-30. Department of Social Services to administer article.**

 The department shall administer the provisions of this article and shall make and promulgate such rules and regulations relating to licensing standards and other matters as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of this article.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-40. Temporary crisis placements.**

 (A) The department is authorized to develop a network of homes and facilities to use for temporary crisis placements for children.

 (B) Temporary crisis placements may be made with licensed child welfare agencies including foster homes and residential group facilities. The department also may use volunteers who are screened by the department for the sole purpose of these placements. The screening of volunteer crisis homes shall include Central Registry of Child Abuse and Neglect and criminal history records checks in accordance with Section 63-7-2340. The department shall develop criteria for screening volunteer crisis homes through promulgation of regulations in accordance with the Administrative Procedures Act.

 (C) Children in temporary crisis placements are not in the custody of the department and must not be considered to be in foster care. No placement of a child in a temporary crisis home or facility may occur unless it is agreed to by the child's parent, guardian, or custodian and the department. Temporary crisis placements may last no longer than seventy-two hours.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-50. License revocation or refusal to renew.**

 The department may revoke the license of any child welfare agency which fails to maintain the proper standards of care and service to children in its charge or which violates any provision of this article. No license shall be revoked or its renewal refused except upon thirty days' written notice thereof. Upon appeal from such revocation or refusal to renew a license, the department shall, after thirty days' written notice thereof, hold a hearing, at which time the agency shall be given an opportunity to present testimony and confront witnesses. An appeal of the agency's decision may be made to an administrative law judge pursuant to the Administrative Procedures Act.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-60. Placing children in family homes.**

 A licensed child welfare agency may place children in family homes for care, if authorized to do so by the department. Any child so placed may be taken from such family home when the child welfare agency responsible for his care is satisfied that the child's welfare requires such action.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-70. Background checks; pardons.**

 (A) A person seeking employment with a child welfare agency for a position with direct unsupervised contact with children must undergo a state fingerprint-based background check to be conducted by the State Law Enforcement Division to determine any state criminal history and a fingerprint-based background check to be conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to determine any other criminal history. A person seeking to serve as a volunteer with a child welfare agency for a position with direct unsupervised contact with children must undergo a state fingerprint-based background check to be conducted by the State Law Enforcement Division to determine any state criminal history and a fingerprint-based background check to be conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to determine any other criminal history. Additionally, the persons described in this section must also undergo a check of the State Central Registry of Child Abuse and Neglect, DSS department records, the equivalent registry system for each state in which the person has resided for five years preceding an application for employment or as a volunteer, the National Sex Offender Public Website, and the state sex offender registry.

 (B) The South Carolina Law Enforcement Division and the Federal Bureau of Investigation are authorized to retain and store fingerprints for further use in the identification of persons including, but not limited to, use in identifying unsolved latent prints. The South Carolina Law Enforcement Division and the Federal Bureau of Investigation are authorized to provide the department with current and future information regarding the fingerprints stored, including arrests, convictions, dispositions, warrants, and other information available to the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, such as civil and criminal information.

 (C) Costs for Federal Bureau of Investigation fingerprint-based background checks required for prospective employees of a child welfare agency must be paid by the individual or entity requesting the background checks.

 (D) When a provision of law or regulation provides for a criminal history background check in connection with licensing, placement, service as a volunteer, or employment with a child welfare agency, the provision of law or regulation may not operate to prohibit licensing, placement, service as a volunteer, or employment when a conviction or plea of guilty or nolo contendere has been pardoned. However, notwithstanding the entry of a pardon, the department, child welfare agency, or employer may consider all information available, including the person's pardoned convictions or pleas and the circumstances surrounding them, to determine whether the person is unfit or otherwise unsuited for licensing, placement, service as a volunteer, or employment.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2024 Act No. 195 (H.3220), § 16, eff May 21, 2024.

**SECTION 63-11-80. Prohibition against certain disclosures of information; exception.**

 An officer, agent or employee of the department or a child welfare agency shall not disclose, directly or indirectly, information learned about a child, the child's parents or relatives, or other persons having custody or control of the child, except in cases involving a child in the custody or control of persons who have military affiliation.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2015 Act No. 62 (H.3548), § 4, eff June 4, 2015.

**SECTION 63-11-90. Penalties.**

 Any person and any officer, agent or employee of the department or of a child welfare agency who violates any of the provisions of this article, or who shall intentionally make any false statement to the department shall, upon conviction thereof, be punished by a fine of not more than one hundred dollars, or by imprisonment for not more than one year, or by both such fine and imprisonment, in the discretion of the court.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

Article 3

Children's Advocacy Centers

**SECTION 63-11-310. Children's advocacy centers.**

 (A) "Children's Advocacy Centers" mean centers which must coordinate a multi-agency response to child maltreatment and assist in the investigation and assessment of child abuse. These centers must provide:

 (1) a neutral, child-friendly facility for forensic interviews;

 (2) the coordination of services for children reported to have been abused;

 (3) services including, but not limited to, forensic interviews, forensic medical examinations, and case reviews by multidisciplinary teams to best determine whether maltreatment has occurred; and

 (4) therapeutic counseling services, support services for the child and nonoffending family members, court advocacy, consultation, and training for professionals who work in the area of child abuse and neglect, to reduce negative impact to the child and break the cycle of abuse.

 (B)(1) Children's Advocacy Centers must establish memoranda of agreement with governmental entities charged with the investigation and prosecution of child abuse. Children's Advocacy Centers must be fully accredited by the National Children's Alliance or must be an associate/developing or affiliate member of the South Carolina Network of Children's Advocacy Centers and be actively pursuing full accreditation with the National Children's Alliance within the next two years.

 (2) Children's Advocacy Centers must establish written policies and procedures for standards of care including, but not limited to, the timely intervention of services between initial contact with the child and the event which led to the child's being referred to the center. Children's Advocacy Centers must make available these written policies and procedures to all professionals who provide services relating to the investigation, treatment, and prosecution of child abuse and neglect within the geographical vicinity of the center.

 (3) Children's Advocacy Center records must be released to the Department of Social Services for purposes of investigation, assessment of allegations of child abuse or neglect, and provision of treatment services to the children or their families. The records must be released to law enforcement agencies and circuit solicitors or their agents who are:

 (a) investigating or prosecuting known or suspected abuse or neglect of a child;

 (b) investigating or prosecuting the death of a child;

 (c) investigating or prosecuting any crime against a child; or

 (d) attempting to locate a missing child.

 This provision does not preclude or override the release of information based upon a subpoena or court order, unless otherwise prohibited by law.

 (C) The South Carolina Network of Children's Advocacy Centers must coordinate and facilitate the exchange of information among statewide centers and provide technical assistance to communities in the establishment, growth, and certification of local centers. The network must also educate the public and legislature regarding the needs of abused children and provide or coordinate multidisciplinary training opportunities which support the comprehensive response to suspected child maltreatment.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2021 Act No. 28 (S.229), § 3, eff May 6, 2022.

Article 4

South Carolina Child Abuse and Neglect Network

**SECTION 63-11-400. Short title.**

 This article may be cited as the "South Carolina Child Abuse and Neglect Network."

HISTORY: 2014 Act No. 153 (H.4347), § 1, eff April 7, 2014; 2025 Act No. 19 (S.276), § 1, eff May 8, 2025.

**SECTION 63-11-410. South Carolina Child Abuse and Neglect Network.**

 There is created the South Carolina Child Abuse and Neglect Network, a program to provide coordination and administration of medical service resources to those entities responding to cases of suspected child abuse or neglect. The program is administered by the University of South Carolina School of Medicine.

HISTORY: 2014 Act No. 153 (H.4347), § 1, eff April 7, 2014; 2025 Act No. 19 (S.276), § 1, eff May 8, 2025.

**SECTION 63-11-420. Definitions.**

 For purposes of this article:

 (1) "Child" has the same meaning as provided for in Section 63-7-20.

 (2) "Child abuse or neglect" has the same meaning as provided for in Section 63-7-20.

 (3) "Children's advocacy centers" has the same meaning as provided for in Section 63-11-310.

 (4) "Program" means the South Carolina Child Abuse and Neglect Network, created pursuant to this article.

 (5) "Healthcare provider" means a physician, advanced practice registered nurse, or physician assistant licensed to practice in this State pursuant to Article 1, Chapter 47, Title 40, Article 1, Chapter 33, Title 40, and Article 7, Chapter 47, Title 40, respectively.

HISTORY: 2014 Act No. 153 (H.4347), § 1, eff April 7, 2014; 2025 Act No. 19 (S.276), § 1, eff May 8, 2025.

**SECTION 63-11-430. Program requirements.**

 (A) The program coordinates and administers child abuse medical service resources for the State, assisting and collaborating with children's advocacy centers and state agencies charged with the investigation, assessment, treatment, and prosecution of child abuse or neglect for children in the State.

 (B) The program shall develop, support, and maintain a consistent quality standard of care and practice for the following services intrinsic to the assessment of children with suspected abuse or neglect:

 (1) forensic medical examinations, assessments, and diagnoses;

 (2) medical consultations;

 (3) participation in multidisciplinary team case conferences and reviews; and

 (4) medical expert witness services.

 (C) The program also shall develop, support, and maintain:

 (1) guidelines for the educational, clinical training, and professional development requirements of health care providers participating in the forensic medical assessment of children who are suspected victims of child abuse or neglect;

 (2) a standardized clinical assessment tool to report the findings of the forensic medical assessment; and

 (3) guidelines for the South Carolina Department of Social Services and law enforcement agencies on when to obtain a forensic medical assessment.

 (D) The program shall collect and manage data from child abuse health care providers participating in the program, children's advocacy centers, and children's hospitals for the purposes of establishing quality assurance programs, research, and public policy guidance.

HISTORY: 2014 Act No. 153 (H.4347), § 1, eff April 7, 2014.

Article 5

Cass Elias McCarter Guardian Ad Litem Program

**SECTION 63-11-500. Creation, purpose, and administration of program.**

 (A) There is created the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program in South Carolina. The program shall serve as a statewide system to provide training and supervision to volunteers who serve as court-appointed special advocates for children in abuse and neglect proceedings within the family court, pursuant to Section 63-7-1620. This program must be administered by the Department of Children's Advocacy.

 (B) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (A), a county providing the guardian ad litem services set forth in subsection (A) prior to the effective date of this act may continue to provide such services, provided the county guardian ad litem program is a member of the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association. However, a county guardian ad litem program operating pursuant to this subsection must comply with all state and federal laws, even if compliance with state or federal laws would result in the violation of a requirement for membership in the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2008 Act No. 288, § 1; 2010 Act No. 202, § 1, eff June 3, 2010; 2014 Act No. 121 (S.22), Pt V, § 7.JJ, eff July 1, 2015; 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 3, eff July 1, 2019.

**SECTION 63-11-510. Responsibilities of guardian ad litem.**

 The responsibilities and duties of a guardian ad litem are to:

 (1) represent the best interests of the child;

 (2) advocate for the welfare and rights of a child involved in an abuse or neglect proceeding;

 (3) conduct an independent assessment of the facts, the needs of the child, and the available resources within the family and community to meet those needs;

 (4) maintain accurate, written case records;

 (5) provide the family court with a written report, consistent with the rules of evidence and the rules of the court, which includes without limitation evaluation and assessment of the issues brought before the court and recommendations for the case plan, the wishes of the child, if appropriate, and subsequent disposition of the case;

 (6) monitor compliance with the orders of the family court and to make the motions necessary to enforce the orders of the court or seek judicial review;

 (7) protect and promote the best interests of the child until formally relieved of the responsibility by the family court.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-520. Persons prohibited from appointment as guardians ad litem.**

 No person may be appointed as a guardian ad litem for a child in an abuse or neglect proceeding who has been convicted of any crime listed in Chapter 3 of Title 16, Offenses Against the Person, in Chapter 15 of Title 16, Offenses Against Morality and Decency, in Article 3 of Chapter 53 of Title 44, Narcotics and Controlled Substances, or for the crime of contributing to the delinquency of a minor, provided for in Section 16-17-490.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-530. Guardian ad litem to represent best interests of the child; removal of volunteer guardian ad litem.**

 (A)(1) The guardian ad litem is charged in general with the duty of representation of the child's best interests. After appointment by the family court to a case involving an abused or neglected child, the guardian ad litem shall receive appropriate notice of all court hearings and proceedings regarding the child. The obligation of the guardian ad litem to the court is a continuing one and continues until formally relieved by the court.

 (2) The South Carolina Guardian ad Litem Program, or a county guardian ad litem program operating pursuant to Section 63-11-500, whichever is appropriate, may intervene in an abuse or neglect proceeding in order to petition the court to relieve the volunteer, lay guardian ad litem from appointment for the following reasons:

 (a) incapacity;

 (b) conflict of interest;

 (c) misconduct;

 (d) persistent neglect of duties;

 (e) incompetence; or

 (f) a knowing and wilful violation of program policies and procedures that affect the health, safety, and welfare of the child.

 (3) The court shall determine what is in the best interest of the child when ruling on the petition.

 (B) The guardian ad litem is authorized to:

 (1) conduct an independent assessment of the facts;

 (2) confer with and observe the child involved;

 (3) interview persons involved in the case;

 (4) participate on any multidisciplinary evaluation team for the case on which the guardian ad litem has been appointed;

 (5) make recommendations to the court concerning the child's welfare;

 (6) make motions necessary to enforce the orders of the court, seek judicial review, or petition the court for relief on behalf of the child.

 (C) The guardian ad litem is authorized through counsel to introduce, examine, and cross-examine witnesses in any proceeding involving the child and participate in the proceedings to any degree necessary to represent the child adequately.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2009 Act No. 37, § 1, eff June 2, 2009.

**SECTION 63-11-540. Right of access to information and records.**

 All reports made and information collected as described in Section 63-7-1990(A) must be made available to the guardian ad litem by the Department of Social Services. Upon proof of appointment as guardian ad litem and upon the guardian ad litem request, access to information must be made available to the guardian ad litem by the appropriate medical and dental authorities, psychologists, social workers, counselors, schools, and any agency providing services to the child.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-550. Confidentiality of records and information.**

 (A) All reports and information collected pursuant to this article maintained by the South Carolina Guardian ad Litem Program, or a county Guardian ad Litem Program operating pursuant to Section 63-11-500(B) or by a guardian ad litem, are confidential. A person who disseminates or permits the unauthorized dissemination of the information is guilty of contempt of court and, upon conviction, may be fined or imprisoned, or both, pursuant to Section 63-3-620. The appointed guardian ad litem may share reports and information collected with the county's Guardian ad Litem Program staff, the Guardian ad Litem Division, and the State Child Advocate.

 (B) The name, address, and other identifying characteristics of a person named in a report determined to be judicially unfounded must be destroyed one year from the date of the determination. The name, address, and other identifying characteristics of any person named in a report determined to be judicially indicated must be destroyed seven years from the date that the guardian ad litem formally is relieved of responsibility as guardian ad litem by the family court.

 (C) The director of the South Carolina Guardian ad Litem Program or the director's designee, or the chief administrator of a county guardian ad litem program operating pursuant to Section 63-11-500(B), may disclose to the media information contained in child protective services records, if disclosure is limited to discussion of the program's activities in handling the case. The program may incorporate into its discussion of the handling of the case any information placed in the public domain by other public officials, a criminal prosecution, the alleged perpetrator or the attorney for the alleged perpetrator, or other public judicial proceedings. For purposes of this subsection, information is considered "placed in the public domain" when it has been reported in the news media, is contained in public records of a criminal justice agency, is contained in public records of a court of law, or has been the subject of testimony in a public judicial proceeding.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2008 Act No. 288, § 2; 2009 Act No. 37, § 2, eff June 2, 2009; 2025 Act No. 8 (H.3654), § 2, eff April 28, 2025.

**SECTION 63-11-560. Immunity from liability for guardian ad litem.**

 After participating in the training program of the South Carolina Guardian ad Litem Program, or a county guardian ad litem program operating pursuant to Section 63-11-500(B), a person who is appointed to serve as guardian ad litem and serves without compensation is not liable for any civil damages for any personal injury as a result of any act or omission by the person in the discharge of the responsibilities of a guardian ad litem if the person acts in good faith and is not guilty of gross negligence.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2008 Act No. 288, § 3.

**SECTION 63-11-570. Funds.**

 The General Assembly shall provide the funds necessary for the South Carolina Guardian ad Litem Program to carry out the provisions of Sections 63-11-500 through 63-11-560 and 63-7-1990(B)(5). The General Assembly shall not provide any funding for a county guardian ad litem program.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2008 Act No. 288, § 4.

Article 7

Foster Care Review Board

**SECTION 63-11-700. Division for Review of the Foster Care of Children; board.**

 (A) There is created, within the Department of Children's Advocacy, the Division for Review of the Foster Care of Children. The division must be supported by a board consisting of seven members, all of whom must be past or present members of local review boards. There must be one member from each congressional district, all appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate.

 (B) Terms of office for the members of the board are for four years and until their successors are appointed and qualify. Appointments must be made by the Governor for terms of four years to expire on June thirtieth of the appropriate year.

 (C) The board shall elect from its members a chairman who shall serve for two years. Five members of the board constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. Members of the board shall receive per diem, mileage, and subsistence as provided by law for members of boards, commissions, and committees while engaged in the work of the board.

 (D) The board shall meet at least quarterly and more frequently upon the call of the division director to review and coordinate the activities of the local review boards and make recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly with regard to foster care policies, procedures, and deficiencies of public and private agencies which arrange for foster care of children as determined by the review of cases provided for in Section 63-11-720(A)(1) and (2). These recommendations must be submitted to the Governor and included in an annual report, filed with the General Assembly, of the activities of the state office and local review boards.

 (E) The Department of Children's Advocacy, upon recommendation of the division director, shall promulgate regulations to carry out the provisions of this article. These regulations shall provide for and must be limited to procedures for: reviewing reports and other necessary information at state, county, and private agencies and facilities; scheduling of reviews and notification of interested parties; conducting local review board and board of directors' meetings; disseminating local review board recommendations, including reporting to the appropriate family court judges the status of judicially approved treatment plans; participating and intervening in family court proceedings; and developing policies for summary review of children privately placed in privately owned facilities or group homes.

 (F) The Department of Children's Advocacy may employ a division director and staff as is necessary to carry out this article, and the funds for the division director, staff, and other purposes of this division must be provided for in the annual general appropriations act.

 (G) This article may not be construed to provide for subpoena authority.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2012 Act No. 279, § 29, eff June 26, 2012; 2014 Act No. 121 (S.22), Pt V, § 7.KK.1, eff July 1, 2015; 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 4, eff July 1, 2019; 2025 Act No. 8 (H.3654), § 3, eff April 28, 2025.

**SECTION 63-11-710. Local boards for review.**

 (A) There are created sixteen local boards for review of cases of children receiving foster care, one in each judicial circuit, composed of five members appointed by the Governor upon recommendation of the legislative delegation of each county within the circuit for terms of four years and until their successors are appointed and qualify. If the county legislative delegations within a judicial circuit have not recommended to the Governor a person to fill a review board vacancy within ninety days after being notified by certified mail that the vacancy exists, then the local review boards in the judicial circuit may recommend to the Governor someone to fill the vacancy. All local board members must be residents of the judicial circuit which they represent, except where a current or former member is substituting for an absent member. Local boards shall elect their chairman.

 (B) If the board of directors determines that additional local review boards are necessary in a judicial circuit because of an excessively large case load for review or if the local board is no longer necessary because of a reduced case load, the board may create or dissolve local review boards by resolution, and the boards created have all authority and duties provided for the boards by the provisions of this article.

 (C) In Dorchester County, appointments made pursuant to this section are governed by the provisions of Act 512 of 1996.

 (D) In Georgetown County, appointments made pursuant to this section are governed by the provisions of Act 515 of 1996.

 (E) In the Fifth Judicial Circuit, the members of one of the local review boards authorized pursuant to subsection (B) must be appointed by the Kershaw County Legislative Delegation. The local review board appointed by the Kershaw County Legislative Delegation shall be the board in the Fifth Judicial Circuit which primarily deals with cases in Kershaw County.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2018 Act No. 175 (H.4832), § 1, eff May 3, 2018.

**SECTION 63-11-720. Functions and powers of local boards.**

 (A) The functions and powers of local foster care review boards are:

 (1) to review once every six months the cases of children who have resided in public foster care for a period of more than four consecutive months to determine what efforts have been made by the supervising agency or child caring facility to acquire a permanent home for the child. Once probable cause has been established to retain the child in foster care, the local review board shall have the discretion to review the case of any child who has been subjected to aggravated circumstances as set forth in Section 63-7-1640(C). Under no circumstances shall the local foster care review board review a child's case more than three times in a twelve month period;

 (2) following review of a case pursuant to this section, the local foster care review board shall submit a written report and recommendations to the court concerning the case, which shall be addressed on the record by the court at the next permanency planning hearing pursuant to Section 63-7-1700(C)(1). In order for the report and recommendations of the Foster Care Review Board to be easily identifiable and accessible by the judge, the report and recommendations must be visually distinct from other documents in the case file in their coloring or other prominent aspect. A child's return home for temporary placements, trial placements, visits, holidays, weekend visits, or changes from one foster care placement to another must not be construed to mean a break or lapse in determination of a consecutive four-month period for children in public foster care;

 (3) to encourage the return of children to their natural parents, or, upon determination during a case review of the local review board that this return is not in the best interest of the child, to recommend to the appropriate agency action be taken for a maximum effort to place the child for adoption;

 (4) to promote and encourage all agencies and facilities involved in placing children in foster care to place children with persons suitable and eligible as adoptive parents;

 (5) to advise foster parents of their right to petition the family court for termination of parental rights and for adoption and to encourage these foster parents to initiate these proceedings in an appropriate case when it has been determined by the local review board that return to the natural parent is not in the best interest of the child;

 (6) to recommend that a child caring facility or agency exert all possible efforts to make arrangements for permanent foster care or guardianship for children for whom return to natural parents or adoption is not feasible or possible as determined during a case review by the local review board;

 (7) to report to the state office of the Department of Social Services and other adoptive or foster care agencies any deficiencies in these agencies' efforts to secure permanent homes for children discovered in the local board's review of these cases as provided for in item (1).

 (B) Any case findings or recommendations of a local review board are advisory.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2016 Act No. 238 (H.4546), § 5, eff June 5, 2016.

**SECTION 63-11-730. Background checks for employees and board members.**

 (A) No person may be employed by the Department of Children's Advocacy or may serve on the state or a local foster care review board if the person:

 (1) is the subject of an indicated report or affirmative determination of abuse or neglect as maintained by the Department of Social Services in the Central Registry of Child Abuse and Neglect pursuant to subarticle 13, Article 3, Chapter 7;

 (2) has been convicted of or pled guilty or nolo contendere to:

 (a) an "offense against the person" as provided for in Title 16, Chapter 3;

 (b) an "offense against morality or decency" as provided for in Title 16, Chapter 15; or

 (c) contributing to the delinquency of a minor, as provided for in Section 16-17-490.

 (B) Before a person is employed by the Division for Review of the Foster Care of Children or before an appointment or reappointment is made to the state or a local foster care review board, the division shall submit the name of the potential employee or a list containing the names, addresses, and social security numbers of persons nominated to serve on the state or local boards to the Department of Social Services for a records check of indicated reports or affirmative determinations from the Central Registry of Child Abuse and Neglect and to SLED for a criminal records background check to certify that no potential employee or person nominated to serve on the state or a local board is in violation of subsection (A). A list of the persons employed by the division or serving on the state or local boards also must be submitted annually to the Department of Social Services for a records check of indicated reports or affirmative determinations to certify that no person employed by the division or serving on a board is in violation of subsection (A)(1). The division may not be charged by the Department of Social Services for these records checks.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2014 Act No. 121 (S.22), Pt V, § 7.KK.2, eff July 1, 2015; 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 5, eff July 1, 2019.

**SECTION 63-11-740. Meetings of local boards; staffing.**

 Local boards shall conduct meetings in the judicial circuit which they represent. Each board must be provided sufficient staff to perform its functions as set forth in this article with funds provided in the annual state general appropriations act. Members of the local boards and former members substituting for an absent member may not receive compensation for their services but must be allowed mileage, per diem, and subsistence as provided by law for state boards, committees, and commissions for attendance at board meetings. If needed to ensure a quorum at a board meeting, a current or former member of a local board may serve as a substitute on a board other than his own board, whether or not the substitute member is a resident of the judicial circuit of that board.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-750. Participation in child abuse and neglect proceedings.**

 (A) The Foster Care Review Board may participate, through counsel, in child abuse and neglect proceedings pursuant to Sections 63-7-1660, 63-7-1700, 63-7-2520 and in any hearing held pursuant to a motion filed by a named party or party in interest. Participation includes the opportunity to cross-examine witnesses and to present its recommendation to the court.

 (B) This section does not require notice of any hearing to be served upon the Foster Care Review Board unless it is a party to the case.

 (C) If the Foster Care Review Board intends to participate in any hearing pursuant to this section, it shall inform the Department of Social Services, the court, and the guardian ad litem coordinator or counsel for the guardian ad litem of its intention to appear and participate in the hearing at least twenty-four hours in advance of the hearing.

 (D) If the Foster Care Review Board intends to become a party to the action, it shall file a motion to intervene. There is a rebuttable presumption that the motion to intervene shall be granted absent a showing that intervention would be unjust or inappropriate in a particular case.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2016 Act No. 238 (H.4546), § 6, eff June 5, 2016.

**SECTION 63-11-760. Immunity from liability.**

 After participating in a training program of the system for the review of foster care of children, a local review board member is not liable for damages for personal injury as a result of an act or omission in the discharge of his duties as a member if he acts in good faith and his conduct does not constitute gross negligence, recklessness, wilfulness, or wantonness.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-770. Cooperation of public and private agencies.**

 All public and private agencies and facilities which provide for or arrange foster care for children shall cooperate with the board of directors and local review boards by making available for review records as may be requested.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-780. Petitions for relief.**

 A person or agency aggrieved by an action or recommendation of a local review board may seek relief by petition to the family court of that county which shall issue a rule to show cause why the action or recommendation of the local review board should not be set aside or modified.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-790. Effect of article on other agencies.**

 The provisions of this article may not be construed to limit or delay actions by agencies or facilities to arrange for adoptions, foster care, termination of parental rights, or other related matters on their own initiative, nor do the provisions of this article in any manner alter or restrict the duties and authority of these agencies and facilities in those matters.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

Article 9

South Carolina Children's Trust Fund

**SECTION 63-11-910. Fund established.**

 (A) There is established the Children's Trust Fund of South Carolina, an eleemosynary corporation, the resources of which must be used to award grants to private nonprofit organizations and qualified state agencies in order to stimulate a broad range of innovative child abuse and neglect prevention programs to meet critical needs of South Carolina's children.

 (B) The trust fund must accept gifts, bequests, and grants from any person or foundation. The trust fund must supplement and augment but not take the place of services provided by state agencies. A state agency is eligible to receive funds under this article only when the state agency:

 (1) proposes a program that meets grant qualifications under this article; and

 (2) provides matching funds in an amount at least equal to the grant to maximize the effectiveness of the grant.

 (C) The board of directors for the trust fund shall carry out activities necessary to administer the fund including assessing service needs and gaps, soliciting proposals to address identified service needs, and establishing criteria for the awarding of grants.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2008 Act No. 273, § 1.

**SECTION 63-11-920. Board of directors; terms; filling vacancies; compensation; reports.**

 There is created the Board of Directors for the Children's Trust Fund of South Carolina composed of seventeen members appointed by the Governor, ten at large from the State from nominees of the Board of Directors of the Children's Trust Fund, plus one from each of the state's congressional districts. Members shall serve for terms of four years and until successors are appointed and qualify. Vacancies for any reason must be filled in the manner of the original appointment for the unexpired term.

 Members may be paid per diem, mileage, and subsistence as established by the board not to exceed the amounts provided by law for state boards, committees, and commissions. A complete report of the activities of the trust fund must be made annually to the General Assembly.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2008 Act No. 273, § 1; 2012 Act No. 279, § 30, eff June 26, 2012.

**SECTION 63-11-930. Powers and duties.**

 To carry out its assigned functions, the board is authorized, but not limited to:

 (1) assess the critical needs for child abuse and neglect prevention;

 (2) receive gifts, bequests, and devises for deposit and investment into the trust fund and to award grants to private nonprofit organizations and state agencies that meet certain qualifications;

 (3) invest trust fund monies;

 (4) solicit proposals for programs which will be aimed at meeting identified child abuse and neglect prevention needs;

 (5) provide technical assistance to private, nonprofit organizations, when requested, in preparing proposals for submission to the trust fund;

 (6) establish criteria for awarding of grants for child abuse and neglect prevention which shall include the consideration of at least:

 (a) the priority of the service need that the proposal addresses;

 (b) the quality and soundness of the proposal and its probable effectiveness in accomplishing its objectives;

 (c) a cost-benefit analysis of the project;

 (d) the degree of community support for the proposal;

 (e) the utilization of local resources including volunteers, when appropriate, and matching or in-kind contributions which may be, but are not required;

 (f) the qualifications of employees to be hired under the grant;

 (g) the experience of the proposed project administrators in providing on going accountability for the program;

 (7) enter into contracts for the awarding of grants to private, nonprofit organizations for child abuse and neglect prevention.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2008 Act No. 273, § 1.

**SECTION 63-11-940. Director.**

 The board of directors may employ a director and other staff as necessary to carry out the duties and responsibilities assigned by the board.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2008 Act No. 273, § 1.

**SECTION 63-11-950. Disbursement of funds.**

 (A) The amount deposited in the trust fund from contributions plus all earnings from the investment of monies of the trust fund credited during the previous fiscal year, after allowances for operating expenses, is available for disbursement upon the authorization of the board of directors.

 (B) A quorum of the board members is necessary to authorize the disbursement of funds.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2008 Act No. 273, § 1.

**SECTION 63-11-960. Deposit and distribution of contributions pursuant to Section 12-6-5060.**

 Funds from the receipt of contributions pursuant to Section 12-6-5060 must be deposited in the Trust Fund for disbursement as prescribed by this article.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2008 Act No. 273, § 1.

Article 11

Children's Case Resolution System [Repealed]

§§ 63-11-1110 to 63-11-1160. Repealed.

HISTORY: Former Section 63-11-1110, titled Creation, had the following history: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2014 Act No. 121 (S.22), Pt V, § 7.LL.1, eff July 1, 2015. Repealed by 2018 Act No. 160, § 15, eff July 1, 2019.

HISTORY: Former Section 63-11-1120, titled Purpose, had the following history: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2. Repealed by 2018 Act No. 160, § 15, eff July 1, 2019.

HISTORY: Former Section 63-11-1130, titled Requirements to be reviewed, had the following history: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2. Repealed by 2018 Act No. 160, § 15, eff July 1, 2019.

HISTORY: Former Section 63-11-1140, titled Functions, had the following history: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2014 Act No. 121 (S.22), Pt V, § 7.LL.2, eff July 1, 2015. Repealed by 2018 Act No. 160, § 15, eff July 1, 2019.

HISTORY: Former Section 63-11-1150, titled Placement of emotionally disturbed children out-of-state, had the following history: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2. Repealed by 2018 Act No. 160, § 15, eff July 1, 2019.

HISTORY: Former Section 63-11-1160, titled Staffing and funding limitations, had the following history: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2. Repealed by 2018 Act No. 160, § 15, eff July 1, 2019.

Article 13

Continuum of Care for Emotionally Disturbed Children

**SECTION 63-11-1310. Purpose.**

 It is the purpose of this article to develop and enhance the delivery of services to severely emotionally disturbed children and youth and to ensure that the special needs of this population are met appropriately to the extent possible within this State. To achieve this objective, the Continuum of Care for Emotionally Disturbed Children Division is established as a division of the Department of Children's Advocacy. This article supplements and does not supplant existing services provided to this population.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2014 Act No. 121 (S.22), Pt V, § 7.MM.2, eff July 1, 2015; 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 6, eff July 1, 2019.

**SECTION 63-11-1320. Clients.**

 (A)(1) The Continuum of Care serves children:

 (a) who have been diagnosed as severely emotionally disturbed;

 (b) who have exhausted existing available treatment resources or services;

 (c) whose severity of emotional, mental, or behavioral disturbance requires a comprehensive and organized system of care.

 (2) Priority in the selection of clients must be based on criteria to be established by the Continuum of Care.

 (B) Before a court refers a child to the Continuum of Care, it must be given the opportunity to evaluate the child and make a recommendation to the court regarding:

 (1) the child's suitability for placement with the Continuum of Care pursuant to the provisions of this article, related regulations, and policies and procedures of administration and operation;

 (2) the agencies which offer services most appropriate to meet the child's needs and the proportionate share of the costs among the agencies to meet those needs;

 (3) the necessity of obtaining other services for the child if the services provided in item (2) are not available through the existing service delivery system.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-1330. Duties.**

 The Continuum of Care shall perform the following duties and functions:

 (1) identify needs and develop plans to address the needs of severely emotionally disturbed children and youth;

 (2) coordinate planning, training, and service delivery among public and private organizations which provide services to severely emotionally disturbed children and youth;

 (3)(a) augment existing resources by providing or procuring services to complete the range of services needed to serve this population in the least restrictive, most appropriate setting. The scope of services includes, but is not limited to:

 (i) in-home treatment programs;

 (ii) residential treatment programs;

 (iii) education services;

 (iv) counseling services;

 (v) outreach services;

 (vi) volunteer and community services;

 (b) provide needed services until they can be procured;

 (4) provide case management services directly;

 (5) supervise and administer the development and operation of its activities and services on a statewide regional basis.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-1340. Director and other staff; promulgation of regulations.**

 The Department of Children's Advocacy may employ a Director of the Continuum of Care and staff necessary to carry out the provisions of this article. The funds for the division director, staff, and other purposes of the Continuum of Care Division must be provided in the annual general appropriations act. The department, upon the recommendation of the division director, may promulgate regulations in accordance with this article and the provisions of the Administrative Procedures Act and formulate necessary policies and procedures of administration and operation to carry out effectively the objectives of this article.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2014 Act No. 121 (S.22), Pt V, § 7.MM.3, eff July 1, 2015; 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 7, eff July 1, 2019; 2025 Act No. 8 (H.3654), § 4.A, eff April 28, 2025.

**SECTION 63-11-1350. Confidentiality.**

 (A) Records, reports, applications, and files kept on any client or potential client of the Continuum of Care are confidential and only may be disclosed in order to develop or provide appropriate services for the client or potential client unless:

 (1) the client or potential client or his guardian consents;

 (2) a court orders the disclosure for conduct of proceedings before it upon a showing that disclosure is in the public interest;

 (3) disclosure is necessary for research conducted or authorized by the Continuum of Care; or

 (4) disclosure is necessary to any entity or state agency providing or potentially providing services to the client or potential client.

 (B) Nothing in this section:

 (1) precludes disclosure, upon proper inquiry, of information as to a client's or potential client's current condition to members of his family; or

 (2) requires the release of records of which disclosure is prohibited or regulated by federal law.

 (C) A person who violates this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, must be fined not more than five hundred dollars or imprisoned not more than one year, or both.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-1360. Annual report.**

 The Continuum of Care Division shall submit, through the Department of Children's Advocacy's annual report to the Governor and General Assembly, its activities and recommendations for changes and improvements in the delivery of services by public agencies serving children.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2014 Act No. 121 (S.22), Pt V, § 7.MM.4, eff July 1, 2015; 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 8, eff July 1, 2019; 2025 Act No. 8 (H.3654), § 4.B, eff April 28, 2025.

Article 15

Interagency System for Caring for Emotionally Disturbed Children

**SECTION 63-11-1510. System established.**

 There is established the Interagency System for Caring for Emotionally Disturbed Children, an integrated system of care to be developed by the Continuum of Care for Emotionally Disturbed Children in the Department of Children's Advocacy, the Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Office of Mental Health, and the Department of Social Services to be implemented by November 1, 1994. The goal of the system is to implement South Carolina's Families First Policy and to support children in a manner that enables them to function in a community setting. The system shall provide assessment and evaluation procedures to insure a proper service plan and placement for each child. This system must have as a key component the clear identification of the agency accountable for monitoring on a regular basis each child's care plan and procedures to evaluate and certify the programs offered by providers.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2014 Act No. 121 (S.22), Pt V, § 7.MM.5, eff July 1, 2015; 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 9, eff July 1, 2019.

**SECTION 63-11-1520. State agency responsibilities.**

 The Department of Social Services, in conjunction with the other agencies involved in the Families First Initiative, shall design and manage a component of the Interagency System for Caring for Emotionally Disturbed Children, for families and children identified as in need of special support in the community or when necessary, in a substitute care setting. In an effort to reduce the number of children developing emotional and behavioral disorders, this component of the system must be designed to provide intense services for children who are at risk for removal or who must be removed from their families or who are having difficulty in substitute care and must include age appropriate substitute care. Services provided under this component of the system may be provided by the department to children who are not in the custody of the State. This component of the system must be implemented by January 1, 1995, and the department shall report quarterly to the Senate Finance Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee on the activities of this component of the system including, but not limited to, services provided clients served, and assessment of the progress and success of this component in carrying out the purposes of this section.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-1530. Services Fund.**

 There is established the Services Fund for Emotionally Disturbed Children. The Interagency System for Caring for Emotionally Disturbed Children, as provided for in Section 63-11-1510, must be paid for solely by the fund and money in the fund must be used only to support the system. The fund must be administered by the Department of Social Services. The Department of Education shall continue to be billed a share of costs for covered children in the system as provided for under the Children's Case Resolution System. The Department of Social Services, in conjunction with other agencies participating in the system, shall develop billing and management protocols that maximize the use of the funds available.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

Article 17

First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees

**SECTION 63-11-1710. Board established; administrative responsibilities.**

 (A) There is established the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees, an eleemosynary corporation, which shall oversee the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness initiative, a broad range of innovative early childhood development and education, family support, health services, and prevention efforts to meet critical needs of South Carolina's children through the awarding of grants to partnerships at the county level as provided for in Section 59-152-90.

 (B) The board may accept gifts, bequests, and grants from any person or foundation. The fund and grants from the fund shall supplement and augment, but not take the place of, services provided by local, state, or federal agencies. The board of trustees shall carry out activities necessary to administer the fund, including assessing service needs and gaps, soliciting proposals to address identified service needs, and establishing criteria for the awarding of grants.

 (C) The board must ensure the fiscal and programmatic accountability of the administration of the State Office of First Steps through the submission of annual reports as required by a state agency including, but not limited to, required reports to the Office of the Governor, General Assembly, State Department of Administration, State Fiscal Accountability Authority, Comptroller General, Inspector General, and State Auditor, which includes the annual accountability report, debt collection report, composite bank account report, sole source reportings, annual budget request beginning with the Governor's annual deadline, recovery audits, Inspector General's fraud, waste, and abuse report, and agency head salary commission reports. Required reporting is to be made public on the recipient's website in the same manner in which state agency reports are made public.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2018 Act No. 152 (H.3591), § 5, eff April 12, 2018.

**SECTION 63-11-1720. Board of trustees; composition; oversight.**

 (A) There is created the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees which must be chaired by the Governor, or his designee, and must include the State Superintendent of Education, or his designee, who shall serve as ex officio voting members of the board.

 (B) In making the appointments specified in subsection (C)(1), (2), and (3) of this section, the Governor, President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives shall seek to ensure diverse geographical representation on the board by appointing individuals from each congressional district as possible.

 (C) The board shall include members appointed in the following manner:

 (1) the Governor shall appoint one member from each of the following sectors:

 (a) parents of young children;

 (b) business community;

 (c) early childhood educators;

 (d) medical providers;

 (e) child care and development providers; and

 (f) the General Assembly, one member from the Senate and one member from the House of Representatives;

 (2) the President of the Senate shall appoint one member from each of the following sectors:

 (a) parents of young children;

 (b) business community;

 (c) early childhood educators; and

 (d) medical or child care and development providers;

 (3) the Speaker of the House of Representatives shall appoint one member from each of the following sectors:

 (a) parents of young children;

 (b) business community;

 (c) early childhood educators; and

 (d) medical or child care and development;

 (4) the Chairman of the Senate Education Committee or his designee;

 (5) the Chairman of the House Education and Public Works Committee or his designee; and

 (6) the chief executive officer of each of the following shall serve as an ex officio voting member:

 (a) Department of Social Services;

 (b) Department of Health and Environmental Control;

 (c) Department of Health and Human Services;

 (d) Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities;

 (e) State Head Start Collaboration Officer;

 (f) Children's Trust of South Carolina; and

 (g) Office of Mental Health.

 (D) The terms of the members are for four years and until their successors are appointed and qualify. The appointments of the members from the General Assembly shall be coterminous with their terms of office.

 (E) Vacancies for any reason must be filled in the manner of the original appointment for the unexpired term. A member may not serve more than two terms or eight years, whichever is longer. A member who misses more than three consecutive meetings without excuse or a member who resigns must be replaced in the same manner as his predecessor. Members may be paid per diem, mileage, and subsistence as established by the board not to exceed standards provided by law for boards, committees, and commissions. A complete report of the activities of the First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees must be made annually to the General Assembly.

 (F) In the event South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness is not reviewed by the House and Senate Legislative Oversight Committees within the period prescribed by Section 2-2-20, a joint House and Senate committee shall conduct a review. The joint committee shall consist of five members appointed by the Chairman of the House Education and Public Works Committee and five members appointed by the Chairman of the Senate Education Committee. The committee must be co-chaired by one member of the House and one member of the Senate. A report must be provided to the Speaker of the House and President Pro Tempore of the Senate within one hundred eighty days after the first meeting of the joint committee.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2014 Act No. 287 (H.3428), § 20.A, eff June 18, 2014; 2018 Act No. 152 (H.3591), § 6, eff April 12, 2018; 2019 Act No. 1 (S.2), § 77, eff January 31, 2019; 2023 Act No. 81 (H.4023), § 5, eff June 19, 2023.

**SECTION 63-11-1725. Advisory council.**

 (A) For the purposes of this article, "advisory council" means the South Carolina Advisory Council established by Executive Order Number 2010-06 in compliance with the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, 42 U.S.C. Section 9837b, et seq.

 (B) The membership of the advisory council is composed of the membership of the Board of Trustees of the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Initiative. Each voting and nonvoting member shall serve as a voting member of the South Carolina Advisory Council, concurrent with his service on the board. In addition, two executive directors from local First Steps Partnerships must serve as voting members on the advisory council with one appointed by the House Education and Public Works Committee and one appointed by the Senate Education Committee.

 (C) The advisory council is an entity distinct from the Board of Trustees and must act accordingly to fulfill its responsibilities under 42 U.S.C. Section 9837b(b)(1)(D)(i) of the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007. The advisory council shall keep separate minutes that explicitly distinguish its actions and votes from those made when acting in the capacity of the board of trustees. The advisory council must officially adjourn before acting as the board of trustees, and the board of trustees shall adjourn before acting as the advisory council.

 (D) The State Director of First Steps shall coordinate the activities of the advisory council. Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. Section 9837(b)(1)(D)(i), the advisory council shall:

 (1) conduct a periodic statewide needs assessment concerning the quality and availability of early childhood education and development programs and services for children from birth to the age of school entry, including an assessment of the availability of high-quality prekindergarten services for low income children in the State;

 (2) identify opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination among federally funded and state-funded child development, child care, and early childhood education programs and services, including collaboration and coordination among state agencies responsible for administering these programs;

 (3) develop recommendations for increasing the overall participation of children in existing federal, state, and local child care and early childhood education programs, including outreach to underrepresented and special populations;

 (4) develop, maintain, and serve as the governing body for a unified and integrated data collection system, implement sound data governance policies that protect privacy, and maintain a comprehensive infrastructure for integrated, and when applicable, longitudinal data for public early childhood education and development programs, and services, and state, local, and federal funding sources throughout the State;

 (5) develop and maintain parent knowledge-building activities, including web-based portals to inform parents of all publicly funded early childhood programs and services which include, but are not limited to, an eligibility screener and common application;

 (6) develop recommendations regarding statewide professional development and career advancement plans for early childhood educators in the State;

 (7) assess the capacity and effectiveness of two-year and four-year public and private institutions of higher education in the State for supporting the development of early childhood educators, including the extent to which these institutions have in place articulation agreements, professional development and career advancement plans, and practice or internships for students to spend time in a Head Start or prekindergarten program;

 (8) prepare an overall strategic plan at least once every five years that establishes clearly defined goals, objectives, strategies, and key measures of progress for optimizing the state's early childhood system. Following creation of such plan, the council shall periodically review the implementation of the plan and review any changes in the state's needs;

 (9) make recommendations for improvements in state early learning standards and undertake efforts to develop high-quality comprehensive early learning standards, as appropriate;

 (10) develop and publish, using available demographic data, an indicators-based measure of school readiness at the state and community level;

 (11) incorporate, within the periodic statewide needs assessments required in 42 U.S.C. Section 9837b, any data related to the capacity and efforts of private sector providers, Head Start providers, and local school districts to serve children from birth to age five, including fiscal, enrollment, and capacity data; and

 (12) perform all other functions, as permitted under federal and state law, to improve coordination and delivery of early childhood education and development to children in this State.

 (E) The advisory council shall designate a meeting as its annual meeting. All of the chief executive officers of the state agencies represented on the Early Childhood Advisory Council must attend the annual meeting in person.

 (F) The advisory council shall prepare an annual report of its activities for presentation to the Governor and General Assembly.

HISTORY: 2014 Act No. 287 (H.3428), § 4, eff June 18, 2014; 2023 Act No. 81 (H.4023), §§ 6, 7, eff June 19, 2023.

**SECTION 63-11-1726. Data-sharing initiatives.**

 All publicly funded early childhood-serving agencies and entities shall participate in data-sharing initiatives supported by the advisory council in furtherance of the requirements listed in Section 63-11-1725.

HISTORY: 2023 Act No. 81 (H.4023), § 4, eff June 19, 2023.

**SECTION 63-11-1730. Board of trustees; promulgation of comprehensive long-term initiative; regulations; policies.**

 To oversee and be accountable for the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Initiative, in accordance with the APA, the board shall:

 (1) develop and promulgate a comprehensive long-range initiative for improving early childhood development and increasing school readiness and literacy, which shall include the specific requirements of Chapter 152, Title 59;

 (2) in accordance with the APA, promulgate regulations and establish guidelines, policies, and procedures for the continued implementation of the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness initiative;

 (3) provide oversight on the continued implementation and evaluation of the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness initiative at the state and local levels;

 (4) establish and promulgate grant qualification requirements and a formula by which allocations for qualifying partnership grants shall be calculated;

 (5) ensure the provision of technical assistance, consultation services and support to First Steps Partnerships including: the creation and annual revision of county needs assessments; the prioritization, implementation, and evaluation of each First Steps Partnership's strategic plans based on needs assessments; and the identification of assets from other funding sources;

 (6) assess and develop recommendations for ensuring coordination and collaboration among service providers at both the state and county level, for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of state programs and funding and other programs and funding sources, as allowable, as necessary to carry out the First Steps to School Readiness initiative, including additional fiscal strategies, redeployment of state resources, and development of new programs;

 (7) establish and promulgate results-oriented measures and objectives and assess whether services provided by First Steps Partnerships to children and families are meeting the goals and achieving the results established for the First Steps initiative pursuant to Chapter 152, Title 59;

 (8) receive gifts, bequests, and devises for deposit for awarding grants to First Steps Partnerships;

 (9) report annually to the General Assembly by January first on activities and progress to include recommendations for changes and legislative initiatives and results of program evaluations;

 (10) establish and promulgate internal policies and procedures to allow the board to operate optimally, which shall include, but not be limited to, an established and consistent process for decision making;

 (11) develop, implement, and document an annual performance process for the Director of the Office of South Carolina First Steps;

 (12) establish and promulgate bylaws for adoption by local First Steps Partnerships;

 (13) establish core personnel policies and procedures for adoption by local First Steps Partnerships;

 (14) develop a standard process by July 1, 2024, for reviewing submissions made by local partnerships as it relates to the hiring, salaries, and annual performance evaluations of local partnership executive directors pursuant to Chapter 152, Title 59;

 (15) establish and promulgate internal evaluation policies and procedures for local partnerships for annual review pursuant to Chapter 152, Title 59; and

 (16) arrange for the conduction of an independent external program evaluation pursuant to Chapter 152, Title 59.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2014 Act No. 287 (H.3428), § 21, eff June 18, 2014; 2023 Act No. 81 (H.4023), § 8, eff June 19, 2023.

**SECTION 63-11-1735. Repealed.**

HISTORY: Former Section, titled BabyNet; definitions; compliance with federal law, had the following history: 2014 Act No. 287 (H.3428), § 5. Repealed by 2018 Act No. 152, § 9, eff April 12, 2018.

**SECTION 63-11-1740. Director and staff; salary duties.**

 The South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees shall employ, by a majority vote, a director of the Office of South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness and other staff as necessary to carry out the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness initiative, established in Title 59, Chapter 152, and other duties and responsibilities as assigned by the board. The director, with the approval of the board, shall hire such staff as is considered necessary to carry out the provisions of the initiative. The South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees shall submit to the Agency Head Salary Commission, pursuant to Sections 8-11-160 and 8-11-165, justification of and recommendations for the salary and any salary increases for the Executive Director of the South Carolina Office of First Steps to School Readiness.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2018 Act No. 152 (H.3591), § 7, eff April 12, 2018.

**SECTION 63-11-1750. Funding.**

 (A) A separate fund must be established to accept nongovernmental grants, gifts, and donations from any public or private source for the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness initiative. Each donor may designate up to one-half of their contribution to specific counties or a county. Both the designated and undesignated funds may be used to meet the local match required in Section 59-152-130. All funds may be carried forward from fiscal year to fiscal year. The State Treasurer shall invest the monies in this fund in the same manner as other funds under his control are invested and all interest derived from the investment of these funds shall remain in the fund. The South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees shall administer and authorize any disbursements from the fund. Private individuals and groups must be encouraged to contribute to this endeavor.

 (B) In addition, a separate fund within the state general fund must be established for monies that may be appropriated by the General Assembly for the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness initiative. These funds may be carried forward from fiscal year to fiscal year. The State Treasurer shall invest the monies in this fund in the same manner as other funds under his control are invested. The South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees shall administer and authorize any disbursements from the fund.

 (C) All interest derived from the investment of the funds in subsections (A) and (B) shall remain a part of each respective fund.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

Article 19

Department of Child Fatalities and The State Child Fatality Advisory Committee

**SECTION 63-11-1900. Policy.**

 It is the policy of this State that:

 (1) every child is entitled to live in safety and in health and to survive into adulthood;

 (2) responding to child deaths is a state and a community responsibility;

 (3) when a child dies, the response by the State and the community to the death must include an accurate and complete determination of the cause of death, the provision of services to surviving family members, and the development and implementation of measures to prevent future deaths from similar causes and may include court action, including prosecution of persons who may be responsible for the death and family court proceedings to protect other children in the care of the responsible person;

 (4) professionals from disparate disciplines and agencies who have responsibilities for children and expertise that can promote child safety and well-being should share their expertise and knowledge toward the goals of determining the causes of children's deaths, planning and providing services to surviving children and nonoffending family members, and preventing future child deaths;

 (5) a greater understanding of the incidence and causes of child deaths is necessary if the State is to prevent future child deaths;

 (6) multi-disciplinary and multi-agency reviews of child deaths can assist the State in the investigation of child deaths, in the development of a greater understanding of the incidence and causes of child deaths and the methods for preventing such deaths, and in identifying gaps in services to children and families;

 (7) access to information regarding deceased children and their families by the Department of Child Fatalities is necessary to achieve the department's purposes and duties; and

 (8) competent investigative services must be sensitive to the needs of South Carolina's children and their families and not unnecessarily intrusive and should be achieved through training, awareness, and technical assistance.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-1910. Definitions.**

 For purposes of this article:

 (1) "Child" means a person under eighteen years of age.

 (2) "Committee" means the State Child Fatality Advisory Committee.

 (3) "Department" means the State Law Enforcement Division's Department of Child Fatalities.

 (4) "Local child protective services agency" means the county department of social services for the jurisdiction where a deceased child resided.

 (5) "Meeting" means both in-person meetings and meetings through telephone conferencing.

 (6) "Preventable death" means a death which reasonable medical, social, legal, psychological, or educational intervention may have prevented.

 (7) "Provider of medical care" means a licensed health care practitioner who provides, or a licensed health care facility through which is provided, medical evaluation or treatment, including dental and mental health evaluation or treatment.

 (8) "Working day" means Monday through Friday, excluding official state holidays.

 (9) "Unexpected death" includes all child deaths which, before investigation, appear possibly to have been caused by trauma, suspicious or obscure circumstances, or child abuse or neglect.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-1920. Department established.**

 There is created within the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) the Department of Child Fatalities which is under the supervision of the Chief of SLED.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-1930. Committee established.**

 (A) There is created a State Child Fatality Advisory Committee composed of:

 (1) the Director of the South Carolina Department of Social Services;

 (2) the Director of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control;

 (3) the State Superintendent of Education;

 (4) the Executive Director of the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy;

 (5) the Chief of the State Law Enforcement Division;

 (6) the Office Director of the Office of Substance Use Services;

 (7) the Office Director of the Office of Mental Health;

 (8) the Office Director of the Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities;

 (9) the Director of the Department of Juvenile Justice;

 (10) the Chief Executive Officer of the Children's Trust of South Carolina;

 (11) one senator to be appointed by the President of the Senate;

 (12) one representative to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives;

 (13) an attorney with experience in prosecuting crimes against children;

 (14) a county coroner or medical examiner;

 (15) a board certified or eligible for board certification child abuse pediatrician, appointed from recommendations submitted by the State Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics;

 (16) a solicitor;

 (17) a forensic pathologist;

 (18) two members of the public at large, one of whom shall represent a private nonprofit organization that advocates children services; and

 (19) the State Child Advocate.

 (B) Those members in items (1)-(12) shall serve ex officio and may appoint a designee to serve in their place from their particular departments or agencies who have administrative or program responsibilities for children and family services. The Governor shall appoint the remaining members, including the coroner or medical examiner and solicitor who shall serve ex officio for terms of four years and until their successors are appointed and qualify.

 (C) The committee shall elect a chairman and vice chairman by a majority vote of the membership, each for a term of two years.

 (D) The committee shall hold meetings at least quarterly. A majority of the committee, excluding the committee members in subsection (A)(11) and (12) or their designees, constitutes a quorum.

 (E) Each ex officio member shall provide sufficient staff and administrative support to carry out the responsibilities of this article.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2; 2014 Act No. 203 (H.4408), § 1, eff June 2, 2014; 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 10, eff July 1, 2019; 2019 Act No. 1 (S.2), § 78, eff January 31, 2019.

**SECTION 63-11-1940. Purpose and duties of department.**

 (A) The purpose of the department is to expeditiously investigate child deaths in all counties of the State.

 (B) To achieve its purpose, the department shall:

 (1) upon receipt of a report of a child death from the county coroner or medical examiner, as required by Section 17-5-540, investigate and gather all information on the child fatality. The coroner or medical examiner immediately shall request an autopsy if SLED determines that an autopsy is necessary. The autopsy must be performed by a pathologist with forensic training as soon as possible. The pathologist shall inform the department of the findings within forty-eight hours of completion of the autopsy. If the autopsy reveals the cause of death to be pathological or an unavoidable accident, the case must be closed by the department. If the autopsy reveals physical or sexual trauma, suspicious markings, or other findings that are questionable or yields no conclusion to the cause of death, the department immediately must begin an investigation;

 (2) request assistance of any other local, county, or state agency to aid in the investigation;

 (3) upon receipt of additional investigative information, reopen a SLED case, and request in writing as soon as possible for the coroner to reopen a case for another coroner's inquest;

 (4) upon receipt of the notification required by item (1), review agency records for information regarding the deceased child or family. Information available to the department pursuant to Section 63-11-1960 and information which is public under Chapter 4, Title 30, the Freedom of Information Act, must be available as needed to the county coroner or medical examiner and county department of social services;

 (5) report the activities and findings related to a child fatality to the State Child Fatality Advisory Committee;

 (6) develop a protocol for child fatality reviews;

 (7) develop a protocol for the collection of data regarding child deaths as related to Section 17-5-540 and provide training to local professionals delivering services to children, county coroners and medical examiners, and law enforcement agencies on the use of the protocol;

 (8) study the operations of local investigations of child fatalities, including the statutes, regulations, policies, and procedures of the agencies involved with children's services and child death investigations;

 (9) examine confidentiality and access to information statutes, regulations, policies, and procedures for agencies with responsibilities for children, including, but not limited to, health, public welfare, education, social services, mental health, alcohol and other substance abuse, and law enforcement agencies and determine whether those statutes, regulations, policies, or procedures impede the exchange of information necessary to protect children from preventable deaths. If the department identifies a statute, regulation, policy, or procedure that impedes the necessary exchange of information, the department shall notify the committee and the agencies serving on the committee and the committee shall include proposals for changes to statutes, regulations, policies, or procedures in the committee's annual report;

 (10) develop a Forensic Pathology Network available to coroners and medical examiners for prompt autopsy findings;

 (11) submit to the Governor and the General Assembly, an annual report and any other reports prepared by the department, including, but not limited to, the department's findings and recommendations;

 (12) promulgate regulations necessary to carry out its purposes and responsibilities under this article.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-1950. Purpose and duties of committee.**

 (A) The purpose of the State Child Fatality Advisory Committee is to decrease the incidences of preventable child deaths by:

 (1) developing an understanding of the causes and incidences of child deaths;

 (2) developing plans for and implementing changes within the agencies represented on the committee which will prevent child deaths; and

 (3) advising the Governor and the General Assembly on statutory, policy, and practice changes which will prevent child deaths.

 (B) To achieve its purpose, the committee shall:

 (1) meet with the department no later than one month after the department receives notification by the county coroner or medical examiner pursuant to Section 17-5-540 to review the investigation of the death;

 (2) undertake annual statistical studies of the incidences and causes of child fatalities in this State. The studies shall include an analysis of community and public and private agency involvement with the decedents and their families before and subsequent to the deaths;

 (3) the committee shall consider training, including cross-agency training, consultation, technical assistance needs, and service gaps. If the committee determines that changes to any statute, regulation, policy, or procedure is needed to decrease the incidence of preventable child deaths, the committee shall include proposals for changes to statutes, regulations, policies, and procedures in the committee's annual report;

 (4) educate the public regarding the incidences and causes of child deaths, the public role in preventing these deaths, and specific steps the public can undertake to prevent child deaths. The committee shall enlist the support of civic, philanthropic, and public service organizations in performing the committee's education duties;

 (5) develop and implement policies and procedures for its own governance and operation;

 (6) submit to the Governor and the General Assembly, an annual written report and any other reports prepared by the committee, including, but not limited to, the committee's findings and recommendations. Annual reports must be made available to the public.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-1960. Access to information.**

 Upon request of the department and as necessary to carry out the department's purpose and duties, the department immediately must be provided:

 (1) by a provider of medical care, access to information and records regarding a child whose death is being reviewed by the department, including information on prenatal care;

 (2) access to all information and records maintained by any state, county, or local government agency, including, but not limited to, birth certificates, law enforcement investigation data, county coroner or medical examiner investigation data, parole and probation information and records, and information and records of social services and health agencies that provided services to the child or family, including information made strictly confidential in Section 63-7-940 concerning unfounded reports of abuse or neglect.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-1970. Subpoena power.**

 When necessary in the discharge of the duties of the department and upon application of the department, the clerks of court shall issue a subpoena or subpoena duces tecum to any state, county, or local agency, board, or commission or to any representative of any state, county, or local agency, board, or commission or to a provider of medical care to compel the attendance of witnesses and production of documents, books, papers, correspondence, memoranda, and other relevant records to the discharge of the department's duties. Failure to obey a subpoena or subpoena duces tecum issued pursuant to this section may be punished as contempt.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-1980. Confidentiality of meetings.**

 (A) Meetings of the committee and department are closed to the public and are not subject to Chapter 4, Title 30, the Freedom of Information Act, when the committee and department are discussing individual cases of child deaths.

 (B) Except as provided in subsection (C), meetings of the committee are open to the public and subject to the Freedom of Information Act when the committee is not discussing individual cases of child deaths.

 (C) Information identifying a deceased child or a family member, guardian, or caretaker of a deceased child, or an alleged or suspected perpetrator of abuse or neglect upon a child may not be disclosed during a public meeting and information regarding the involvement of any agency with the deceased child or family may not be disclosed during a public meeting.

 (D) Violation of this section is a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, a person must be fined not more than five hundred dollars or imprisoned not more than six months, or both.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

**SECTION 63-11-1990. Confidentiality of information.**

 (A) All information and records acquired by the committee and by the department in the exercise of their purposes and duties pursuant to this article are confidential, exempt from disclosure under Chapter 4, Title 30, the Freedom of Information Act, and only may be disclosed as necessary to carry out the committee's and department's duties and purposes.

 (B) Statistical compilations of data which do not contain information that would permit the identification of a person to be ascertained are public records.

 (C) Reports of the committee and department which do not contain information that would permit the identification of a person to be ascertained are public information.

 (D) Except as necessary to carry out the committee's and department's purposes and duties, members of the committee and department and persons attending their meeting may not disclose what transpired at a meeting which is not public under Section 63-11-1970 and may not disclose information, the disclosure of which is prohibited by this section.

 (E) Members of the committee, persons attending a committee meeting, and persons who present information to the committee may not be required to disclose in any civil or criminal proceeding information presented in or opinions formed as a result of a meeting, except that information available from other sources is not immune from introduction into evidence through those sources solely because it was presented during proceedings of the committee or department or because it is maintained by the committee or department. Nothing in this subsection may be construed to prevent a person from testifying to information obtained independently of the committee or which is public information.

 (F) Information, documents, and records of the committee and department are not subject to subpoena, discovery, or the Freedom of Information Act, except that information, documents, and records otherwise available from other sources are not immune from subpoena, discovery, or the Freedom of Information Act through those sources solely because they were presented during proceedings of the committee or department or because they are maintained by the committee or department.

 (G) Violation of this section is a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, a person must be fined not more than five hundred dollars or imprisoned for not more than six months, or both.

HISTORY: 2008 Act No. 361, § 2.

Article 21

Military-Connected Children's Welfare Task Force

**SECTION 63-11-2110. Military-Connected Children's Welfare Task Force.**

 (A) There is created the "Military-Connected Children's Welfare Task Force" for the purpose of identifying issues related to military-connected children and opening communication between child welfare agencies of this State and local military installations. The task force shall study issues relating to military-connected children as the task force may undertake or as may be requested by the General Assembly.

 (B) The task force is to be comprised of the following members:

 (1) the Director of the Department of Health and Human Services, or his designee;

 (2) the Governor, or his designee;

 (3) the Speaker of the House of Representatives, or his designee;

 (4) the President of the Senate, or his designee; and

 (5) a representative of the Children's Trust Fund.

 (C) The task force shall meet as soon as practicable after the effective date of this act for organizational purposes.

 (D) The task force shall submit an annual written report to the General Assembly including recommendations to facilitate and open communication between child welfare agencies of this State and local military installations. The findings and recommendations of the task force shall be posted on the Department of Health and Human Services' website.

 (E) The members of the task force shall serve without compensation and may not receive mileage or per diem.

HISTORY: 2014 Act No. 289 (S.825), Pt IV, § 4, eff June 23, 2014; 2019 Act No. 1 (S.2), § 79, eff January 31, 2019.

Article 22

Department of Children's Advocacy

**SECTION 63-11-2210. Department of Children's Advocacy established.**

 There is created the Department of Children's Advocacy. The department shall be headed by the State Child Advocate, who is the director of the department. The Governor shall appoint the State Child Advocate from three candidates recommended by the Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children and upon the advice and consent of the Senate for a term of six years. The Governor may reappoint the State Child Advocate for additional terms. The State Child Advocate is subject to removal by the Governor for malfeasance, misfeasance, incompetency, absenteeism, conflicts of interest, misconduct, persistent neglect of duty in office, or incapacity upon recommendation of the Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children. A vacancy shall be filled in the same manner as appointment.

HISTORY: 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 1, eff July 1, 2019.

**SECTION 63-11-2215. Administrative support of department.**

 The Department of Administration shall provide administrative support to the Department of Children's Advocacy for the performance of its duties, including, but not limited to, financial accounting support, human resources administrative support, information technology shared services support, procurement services, and logistical support.

HISTORY: 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 1, eff July 1, 2019.

**SECTION 63-11-2220. Composition of department; salaries.**

 The department shall be comprised of deputy child advocates, investigators, and other staff to be employed as necessary by the State Child Advocate to carry out the duties of the department as authorized by law. The deputy child advocates serve at will and may be removed by the State Child Advocate. The State Child Advocate shall fix the salaries of all staff subject to the funds authorized in the annual general appropriations act.

HISTORY: 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 1, eff July 1, 2019.

**SECTION 63-11-2230. Definitions.**

 For purposes of this article:

 (1) "Critical incident" means the fatality, near fatality, or serious bodily or emotional injury of a child who is in the custody of or receiving services from a state agency, or circumstances that result in a reasonable belief that a state agency failed in its duty to protect a child, resulting in the imminent risk or suffering of serious bodily or emotional injury, or death, of a child.

 (2) "State agency" means an agency as provided in Section 63-11-2240(A).

HISTORY: 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 1, eff July 1, 2019.

**SECTION 63-11-2240. State Child Advocate; responsibilities; qualifications.**

 (A) The State Child Advocate is responsible for ensuring that children receive adequate protection and care from services or programs offered by the Department of Social Services, the Office of Mental Health, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Health and Environmental Control, the Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, the John de la Howe School, the Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School, and the School for the Deaf and the Blind.

 (B) The State Child Advocate must not have been the director or deputy director of a state agency for a period of four years preceding his appointment. This subsection does not apply to deputy directors employed by the Department of Children's Advocacy.

 (C) The State Child Advocate must be selected without regard to political affiliation and on the basis of integrity and a capability for strong leadership and must possess the following minimum qualifications:

 (1) a baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university; and

 (2) at least ten years of experience in family or children's law, children's social work, or children's health and welfare.

HISTORY: 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 1, eff July 1, 2019.

**SECTION 63-11-2250. Confidentiality.**

 Any and all information and records acquired by the Department of Children's Advocacy in the exercise of the office's purpose and duties under this chapter shall be confidential and exempt from public disclosure under Chapter 4, Title 30.

HISTORY: 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 1, eff July 1, 2019.

**SECTION 63-11-2260. Compensation of State Child Advocate.**

 The State Child Advocate shall receive compensation as established under the provisions of Section 8-11-160 and for which funds have been authorized in the general appropriations act.

HISTORY: 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 1, eff July 1, 2019.

**SECTION 63-11-2270. Duties; reports; access.**

 The Department of Children's Advocacy shall:

 (1) ensure that children under the care of a state agency, particularly children served by the child welfare or juvenile justice systems, receive timely, safe, and effective services and shall safeguard the health, safety, and well-being of all children receiving services;

 (2) examine, on a system-wide basis, the care and services that state agencies provide children and shall provide recommendations to improve the quality of those services in order to give each child the opportunity to live a full and productive life;

 (3) develop and promote a broad vision for reform, driven by the values and goals of child-serving agencies, to make the services and programs provided by state agencies more effective for children, youth, families, and communities;

 (4) receive and investigate complaints related to the provision of services to children by a state agency, shall review and monitor the complaints that reasonably cause the department to believe that a child may be in need of assistance, and shall ensure that the complaints are resolved. If a complaint is not resolved by the relevant state agency within a reasonable period of time in light of the circumstances, if the resolution is determined to be unsatisfactory to the State Child Advocate, or if the complaint reasonably causes the State Child Advocate to believe that a child may be in need of immediate assistance, then the State Child Advocate may conduct an investigation of the complaint;

 (5) receive and investigate complaints from children in the care of the State, shall assist such children in resolving problems and concerns associated with their placement and plans for lifelong adult connections and independent living, shall ensure that relevant state agencies have been alerted to the complaints, and shall facilitate intra-agency cooperation, if appropriate;

 (6) undertake activities designed to educate the public regarding the services and the independent role of the department and the mission of state agencies in providing services to children and families;

 (7) annually submit a report to the Governor, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children detailing the State Child Advocate's activities; and

 (8) have access at any and all reasonable times to any facility, residence, program, or portion thereof that is operated, licensed, or funded by a state agency and shall have unrestricted access to all electronic information systems records, reports, materials, and employees in order to better understand the needs of children in the custody of the State or children who are receiving services from a state agency. The Department of Children's Advocacy shall also have access to relevant records held by the clerks of the family courts and the clerks of the probate courts and shall also have the right to inspect and copy such records, without cost.

HISTORY: 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 1, eff July 1, 2019.

**SECTION 63-11-2280. Critical incidents; reporting requirements; investigation.**

 (A) A state agency shall inform the Department of Children's Advocacy within twenty-four hours of a critical incident.

 (B) The State Child Advocate may perform an independent investigation of a critical incident, or the State Child Advocate may review a completed critical incident investigation performed by a state agency. If the State Child Advocate conducts his own investigation, then he shall investigate:

 (1) the factual circumstances surrounding the critical incident;

 (2) whether an agency's activities or services provided to a child and his family were adequate, appropriate, and in accordance with agency policies and state and federal law; and

 (3) whether the agency's policies, regulations, training, or delivery of services or state law can be improved.

 (C) As part of an investigation, the State Child Advocate may:

 (1) administer oaths;

 (2) examine witnesses under oath;

 (3) issue subpoenas and subpoenas duces tecum; and

 (4) examine the records, reports, audits, reviews, papers, books, recommendations, contracts, correspondence, or any other documents maintained by an agency.

 (D) The State Child Advocate may apply to a circuit court for an order holding an individual in contempt of court if the individual refuses to give sworn testimony under a subpoena issued by the State Child Advocate or otherwise disobeys a subpoena or subpoena duces tecum issued by the State Child Advocate.

 (E) In addition to the reporting requirements in subsection (A), if the State Child Advocate has reasonable cause to believe that a crime has occurred or is occurring, then he shall immediately report the matter to the appropriate state or federal law enforcement agencies and prosecuting authorities with jurisdiction over the matter.

HISTORY: 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 1, eff July 1, 2019.

**SECTION 63-11-2290. Toll-free public telephone number and electronic complaint submission form; agencies required to post number and web address.**

 (A) The Department of Children's Advocacy shall establish a toll-free public telephone number and an electronic complaint submission form on the department's website for the purpose of receiving complaints relative to the provision of services to children by a state agency. The department shall transfer a complainant to the appropriate agency if the complainant's submission is related to abuse, neglect, or an open matter within another agency.

 (B) The following agencies must post the toll-free public telephone number and the web address of the department's electronic complaint submission form prominently in clear view of all employees and the public and in a conspicuous location on the agency's website:

 (1) Department of Social Services;

 (2) Office of Mental Health;

 (3) Department of Juvenile Justice;

 (4) Department of Health and Environmental Control;

 (5) Department of Health and Human Services;

 (6) Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities;

 (7) John de la Howe School;

 (8) School for the Deaf and the Blind; and

 (9) Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School.

HISTORY: 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 1, eff July 1, 2019.

**SECTION 63-11-2295. Complaints regarding State Child Advocate and department.**

 (A) Complaints regarding any allegations against the State Child Advocate, the Department of Children's Advocacy, or any of its affiliated divisions should be submitted in writing to the State Inspector General under the authority provided by the provisions of Chapter 6, Title 1. The State Inspector General shall determine if an investigation is warranted and shall provide a written finding at the end of an investigation, which must be provided to the complainant, the Governor, the Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children, and the State Child Advocate. The State Child Advocate shall develop policies and procedures for receipt of such complaints and their referral to the State Inspector General.

 (B) No discriminatory, disciplinary, or retaliatory action may be taken against an employee of an agency, an employee of an entity contracting with an agency, a foster parent, or a recipient of family and children's services for any communication made, or information given or disclosed, to aid the department in carrying out its responsibilities, unless the communication or information is made, given, or disclosed maliciously or without good faith.

HISTORY: 2018 Act No. 160 (S.805), § 1, eff July 1, 2019.

Article 24

South Carolina Child Abuse Response Protocol

**SECTION 63-11-2400. South Carolina Child Abuse Response Protocol; failure to comply with protocol.**

 In the investigation of a known or suspected crime against a child, a multidisciplinary team must follow the South Carolina Child Abuse Response Protocol as developed by the South Carolina Children's Justice Act Task Force and the South Carolina Network of Children's Advocacy Centers. Failure to comply with the South Carolina Child Abuse Response Protocol may not be used by the defense in any prosecution and is not grounds for dismissal of any criminal charge, nor does it provide any cause of action against any state agency, political subdivision, member of a multidisciplinary team, member of any prosecutor's office, member of any law enforcement agency, or law enforcement officer.

HISTORY: 2021 Act No. 28 (S.229), § 2, eff May 6, 2022.

**SECTION 63-11-2410. Establishment of Child Abuse Protocol Review Committee; membership; meetings.**

 (A) The South Carolina Children's Justice Act Task Force and the South Carolina Network of Children's Advocacy Centers shall develop and provide initial training on the protocol and updated training as needed for this purpose. The protocol must be publicly available and must be annually reviewed and updated as needed by an advisory committee known as the Child Abuse Protocol Review Committee.

 (B)(1) The Governor shall appoint the members of the Child Abuse Protocol Review Committee and may consult with the South Carolina Children's Justice Act Task Force and the South Carolina Network of Children's Advocacy Centers in making his appointments. The committee shall consist of thirteen members as follows:

 (a) the Executive Director of the South Carolina Network of Children's Advocacy Centers, or his designee;

 (b) one member from state law enforcement;

 (c) one member from county law enforcement;

 (d) one member from a solicitor's office;

 (e) the Executive Director of the Department of Social Services, or his designee;

 (f) one member who is the Medical Director of the South Carolina Children's Advocacy Medical Response System, or his designee;

 (g) one member from the State Guardian Ad Litem Program or Richland County Court Appointed Special Advocates;

 (h) one member from a school district;

 (i) one member from a statewide organization experienced in working with children with all disabilities;

 (j) the Executive Director of the South Carolina Police Chief's Association, or his designee;

 (k) the Executive Director of the South Carolina Sheriff's Association, or his designee; and

 (l) two at-large members.

 (2) The Department of Children's Advocacy shall convene the first meeting of the committee for the purpose of electing a chair and shall thereafter provide staff support to the committee. Members of the committee shall serve for terms of four years and may serve in a holdover capacity for up to six months after the expiration of their term, should a qualified successor not be appointed.

HISTORY: 2021 Act No. 28 (S.229), § 2, eff May 6, 2021, eff May 6, 2022.

**SECTION 63-11-2420. Maintenance of protocol.**

 The Department of Children's Advocacy shall maintain the protocol and the committee's updates to the protocol.

HISTORY: 2021 Act No. 28 (S.229), § 2, eff May 6, 2022.