

CHAPTER 90

AN ACT concerning child advocacy centers and multidisciplinary teams and supplementing Title 9 of the Revised Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

C.9:6-8.107 Findings, declarations relative to child advocacy centers and multidisciplinary teams.

1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

a. Child advocacy centers are child-friendly centers where a multidisciplinary team of law enforcement, child protective services, prosecutors, mental health and medical professionals, and victim witness and family advocates can provide a coordinated response to the investigation, treatment, prosecution, and prevention of child abuse and neglect.

b. Child advocacy centers and multidisciplinary teams are designed to ease the stress experienced by survivors of child abuse and neglect, and their families, throughout the investigation process and improve methods of responding to acts of child abuse and neglect.

c. Child advocacy centers and multidisciplinary teams reduce the trauma suffered by children who have been abused or neglected by employing forensic interviewers specifically trained to work with survivors of child abuse and neglect.

d. The centers and teams also assist child abuse and neglect survivors and their families in obtaining judicial, medical, therapeutic, and victim advocacy services, and enhance the effectiveness of law enforcement, prosecutors, and child protective services professionals when investigating child abuse and neglect.

e. The number of child advocacy centers in the United States has grown dramatically since 1986 when the first center was established. According to the National Children's Alliance, the national accrediting organization for child advocacy centers, there are now more than 770 centers nationwide, and, as of 2009, there were over 900 multidisciplinary teams throughout the United States.

f. In order to ensure the effective, efficient, and consistent delivery of services to the survivors of child abuse and neglect and their families, it is necessary to establish a certification program for the State's child advocacy centers and multidisciplinary teams.

g. Therefore, it is the intent of the Legislature to create a certification program for the State's child advocacy centers and multidisciplinary teams through the adoption and implementation of guidelines of practice consistent with the accreditation standards developed by the National Children's Alliance, or its successor.

C.9:6-8.108 Definitions relative to child advocacy centers and multidisciplinary teams.

2. As used in this act:

"Child advocacy center" means a county-based center as defined in section 6 of P.L.1998, c.19 (C.9:6-8.104).

"Multidisciplinary team" means a county-based team as established in section 6 of P.L.1998, c.19 (C.9:6-8.104).

C.9:6-8.109 Child Advocacy Center-Multidisciplinary Team Advisory Board.

3. a. There is established in, but not of, the Department of Children and Families in the Executive Branch of State government the Child Advocacy Center-Multidisciplinary Team Advisory Board. For the purpose of complying with the provisions of Article V, Section IV, paragraph 1 of the New Jersey Constitution, the Child Advocacy Center-Multidisciplinary Team Advisory Board is allocated within the Department of Children and Families, but,

notwithstanding this allocation, the advisory board shall be independent of any supervision or control by the department or by any officer or employee thereof.

b. The purpose of the board is to establish a certification program for the State's child advocacy centers and multidisciplinary teams to ensure that the certified centers and teams comply with the accreditation standards developed by the National Children's Alliance, or its successor.

c. The board shall consist of 14 members as follows:

(1) the Commissioner of Children and Families, the Attorney General, the Chairperson of the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect, and the Chapter Coordinator of New Jersey Children's Alliance or their designees, who shall serve *ex officio*; and

(2) ten public members, with at least 10 years' experience, background, or specialized knowledge in child welfare, child advocacy centers, and multidisciplinary teams, to be appointed by the Governor, including a representative of the New Jersey Prosecutors' Association, a law guardian, a multidisciplinary team coordinator, a pediatrician with expertise in child abuse and neglect, a psychologist with expertise in child abuse and neglect, a representative of a child advocacy center, a representative of a victim or family advocacy group, a law enforcement officer with experience in child abuse and neglect investigations, an academician with experience and expertise in child abuse and neglect research or a related field; and one member with general expertise in child welfare and multidisciplinary teams.

d. Vacancies in the membership of the board shall be filled in the same manner provided for the original appointments. The members of the board shall serve without compensation, but may be reimbursed for traveling and other miscellaneous expenses necessary to perform their duties, within the limits of funds made available to the board for its purposes.

e. The board shall organize as soon as practicable, but no later than 60 days following the appointment of its members, and shall select a chairperson and vice-chairperson from among the members.

The chairperson shall appoint a secretary who need not be a member of the board.

f. The board may meet at the call of its chair and hold hearings at the times and in the places it deems appropriate and necessary to fulfill its charge. The board shall be entitled to call to its assistance and avail itself of the services of the employees of any State, county, or municipal department, board, bureau, commission, or agency as it may require and as may be available to it for its purposes.

g. The Department of Children and Families shall provide professional and clerical staff to the board as necessary to effectuate the purposes of this act.

C.9:6-8.110 Duties of board.

4. The board shall:

a. direct the development and implementation of a certification program for the State's child advocacy centers and multidisciplinary teams pursuant to section 5 of this act;

b. develop a comprehensive plan for evaluating the effectiveness of the State's child advocacy centers and multidisciplinary teams; and

c. apply for and accept any grant of money from the State or federal government or other sources, which may be available to establish, expand, or improve child advocacy centers or multidisciplinary teams pursuant to section 7 of this act. Any monies received by the board shall be deposited in the "Child Advocacy Center-Multidisciplinary Team Fund" established pursuant to section 6 of this act.

C.9:6-8.111 Certification program; goal.

5. a. The board shall establish a certification program for the State's child advocacy centers and multidisciplinary teams. The goal of the program shall be to ensure that:

(1) every child advocacy center or multidisciplinary team in the State applying for certification pursuant to subsection b. of this section is in compliance with guidelines of practice that are consistent with the accreditation standards developed by the National Children's Alliance, or its successor; and

(2) the State's child advocacy centers and multidisciplinary teams incorporate best practices and standards in providing child abuse prevention, intervention, and treatment services to survivors of child abuse and neglect.

b. Every child advocacy center and multidisciplinary team in the State may apply to the board for certification in a manner and on a form prescribed by the board. In order to qualify for certification with the board, a child advocacy center or multidisciplinary team shall adopt and implement guidelines of practice that are consistent with the accreditation standards developed by the National Children's Alliance, or its successor. The guidelines shall, at a minimum, provide for:

(1) a multidisciplinary team response in an investigation of child abuse and neglect by representatives of the following core disciplines: law enforcement, child protective services, mental health, prosecution, victim advocacy, and medicine;

(2) the designation of a private, child-friendly interview and family meeting room which provides an environment that is physically and psychologically safe for, and provides comfort to, a survivor of child abuse and neglect and the survivor's family during the course of an investigation of child abuse and neglect;

(3) protocols governing the forensic interview of a survivor of child abuse and neglect that comply with the 2010 Guidelines of Practice for Child Abuse Multidisciplinary Teams in New Jersey and current best practice standards and nationally recognized methods for forensic interviews, New Jersey Court Rules, relevant case law, and internal or external peer review;

(4) an interdisciplinary case review process that describes the responsibilities of each team member in an investigation of child abuse and neglect and the provisions of the services to a survivor of child abuse and neglect and the survivor's family;

(5) a uniform system to identify, track, collect, and coordinate information obtained during an investigation of child abuse and neglect, and to monitor the progress and outcomes of the investigation;

(6) procedures to facilitate communication, collaboration, coordination, information sharing, problem solving, and decision making between team members during an investigation of child abuse and neglect;

(7) a dispute resolution process to resolve interdisciplinary conflicts that may arise between team members during the course of an investigation of child abuse and neglect;

(8) the provision of services, supports, and other assistance in a culturally competent manner to a survivor of child abuse and neglect and the survivor's family during an investigation of child abuse and neglect;

(9) on-going, specialized interdisciplinary training for team members to enhance their basic skills and expertise in the investigation and prevention of child abuse and neglect;

(10) mechanisms and processes to allow the center to self-evaluate the effectiveness of its operations and its success in investigating child abuse and neglect;

(11) the establishment of county based child advocacy center-multidisciplinary team advisory boards to oversee the operations and administration of the child advocacy center or multidisciplinary team;

(12) the creation of an education and outreach program to train professionals from State and local governmental and community-based social services agencies in providing multidisciplinary services to survivors of child abuse and neglect and their families, and to educate the community on child maltreatment and child abuse prevention techniques;

(13) procedures to apply for and accept any grant of money from the State or federal government or other sources, which may be available to child advocacy centers and multidisciplinary teams; and

(14) reporting requirements on the use of grant funds received by a child advocacy center or multidisciplinary team pursuant to section 7 of this act.

c. If a child advocacy center or multidisciplinary team adopts and implements the guidelines of practice specified in subsection b. of this section, the board shall certify that a child advocacy center or multidisciplinary team is in compliance with the provisions of this act.

d. The board shall conduct an annual compliance review of each child advocacy center and multidisciplinary team the board certifies pursuant to subsection c. of this section, and shall evaluate the center or team to determine whether it continues to comply with the provisions of this act.

C.9:6-8.112 “Child Advocacy Center-Multidisciplinary Team Fund.”

6. There is established in the Department of Children and Families a fund to be known as the "Child Advocacy Center-Multidisciplinary Team Fund." This fund shall be the repository for monies appropriated to support the grant program established pursuant to section 7 of this act and any other funds approved by the board.

C.9:6-8.113 Distribution of grants.

7. a. The monies deposited in the Child Advocacy Center-Multidisciplinary Team Fund shall be distributed by the Department of Children and Families as grants to child advocacy centers or multidisciplinary teams certified by the board pursuant to subsection c. of section 5 of this act, as applicable to:

(1) establish or construct new centers, or renew, renovate, improve, expand, or reconstruct existing centers;

(2) make technological improvements, including the modernization of software and hardware;

(3) hire personnel, fund new positions, expand the responsibilities of existing positions, pay for additional diagnostic treatment services and other costs, and provide for continuing funding that has been eliminated from a State, federal, or private funding source for diagnostic mental health and medical treatment services, as necessary, to establish new services or improve existing services provided by the centers or teams; and

(4) fund any other purpose that would enhance the effective and efficient operation of the centers or teams.

b. The Department of Children and Families shall accept and approve the applications of child advocacy centers or multidisciplinary teams for grants from the fund, and shall award the grants to new centers or teams that apply and qualify for, and existing centers or teams that meet the requirements of, certification in accordance with subsection b. of section 5 of this act. The Department of Children and Families shall maintain records of all the grants made from the fund pursuant to this section.

C.9:6-8.114 Rules, regulations.

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8. Pursuant to the "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), the board and the Department of Children and Families may adopt any rules and regulations necessary to effectuate the purposes of this act.

9. This act shall take effect on the 90th day after the date of enactment.

Approved June 9, 2017.