



Executive Division
627 North 4th Street
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

(O) 225.342.0286
(F) 225.342.8636
www.dcfslouisiana.gov

John Bel Edwards, Governor
Marketa Garner Walters, Secretary

DEPARTMENTAL MEMORANDUM 20-19

DATE: DECEMBER 17, 2020

TO: ALL DCFS STAFF

**FROM: TERRI RICKS
DEPUTY SECRETARY**

RE: HAPPY HOLIDAYS AND PREPARING FOR THE NEW YEAR

I wish you all Happy Holidays! I'm looking forward to celebrating Christmas and the turn of the Year. We are hopeful for 2021, and I am convinced that all of us working together will ensure that 2021 is a year of resilience for one and all.

I'm reminded that we can each sit in a space of gratitude for employment when so many are struggling. It's also helpful to see ourselves as part of the much-needed support for those that are struggling. DCFS's programs are truly essential for assisting families experiencing hard times. That means we are each and all vital to the work.

As the need for our programs rise, we have revisited our service delivery needs. What we know to be true is that there is no service delivery without each of you. Louisiana needs us, so while we heed the Governor's admonitions to mask up and practice social distancing to stop the spread, we must join others who do critical work to serve our community.

We have evaluated and expanded work-from-home options, while keeping offices open. Work-from-home options are an important tool in our kit, and yet we know not all our work can be completed at home. Therefore, it has become clear that more staff are needed at DCFS work sites in order to complete all necessary program tasks. Toward that end, this memo is a heads up to upcoming changes regarding staff being available to work to meet those necessary tasks. It is clear: we need all available staff to take care of all the vital tasks of our programs as needed, where needed.

This memo is not about increasing the number of people that report to an office at any given time; it is about increasing the number of staff available to work as needed, where needed. We will always follow mandates and guidance about the occupancy rate, the numbers of those in an office at any given time. As of today's date, the Secretary has determined that offices should have 50% or less occupancy. When that number changes, another memorandum will be published.



Education-Related Choices

Some schools are asking parents now to declare their intentions regarding whether they plan to send their child(ren) for in-person or virtual learning. All employees will be expected to return to the office when requested by their supervisor, so employees should think carefully about their choices, for even employees who opt for virtual schooling when an in-person option is available will be expected to return to the work site when requested by their supervisor. If you choose the virtual option, please have a plan for appropriate childcare. Employees who have a child participating in a hybrid learning program, are expected to return to the work site when requested while their child is attending in-person learning.

Any prior approval for work schedule changes and work site changes will expire on January 15, 2021. Therefore, any employee with a COVID-19 dependent care challenge (such as before and after care issues, hybrid learning or mandatory 100% virtual schedule, etc.) must put in a new request for consideration.

Caring for or Living with a Vulnerable Individual

So far, we have been able to allow employees caring for or living with an individual who is vulnerable and at risk of COVID to work from home. When we return from the holidays, we will not be able to continue to exempt those employees from working as needed, where needed. Any prior approval to work 100% virtually will expire on January 15, 2021. As such, each of us will need to be prepared to work as needed, where needed after that date.

Employee with High Risk/Compromised Immune System

We plan to issue a memorandum for health-related accommodations in January. The Department will allow staff to request health-related accommodations if staff are unable to return to any in-office work. The department has been working on a new medical form that allows the healthcare provider to make a more complete determination regarding an employee's ability to work. The Department is moving towards engaging in an interactive process with the employee and health care provider to determine if and what kind of accommodation is appropriate. We want to support both the employee's needs and the Department's needs. Be assured that the form will not require information about an employee's specific diagnosis or medical condition.

FINAL REMARKS

As we are in unprecedented times with the need for our services growing, we must have staff available for all necessary tasks, while keeping with safety protocols. We want to provide unprecedented support while keeping the work of the department going. Making sure we have as many staff as possible able to cover all necessary tasks will lessen the overall burden. Let's continue to work together. You are DCFS's most important asset. In this time of holiday giving, let us expressly consider the special way we give to Louisiana through our services. Louisiana needs us more than ever.

