DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
SOCIAL SERVCES ADMINISTRATION
311 W. SARATOGA ST.
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201

DATE:	September 15, 2015
POLICY # :	SSA-CW# 16-04 (Supersedes and Replaces Policy SSA-CW #14-5)
TO:	Directors, Local Departments of Social Services Assistant Directors, Services
FROM:	Tracey Paliath Deputy Secretary of Programs
RE:	Runaway/Missing or Abducted Children
PROGRAMS AFFECTED:	Out-of-Home Placement Services
ORIGINATING OFFICE:	Out-of-Home Placement
ACTION REQUIRED OF:	All Local Departments
REQUIRED ACTION:	Implement Policy and Procedures
ACTION DUE:	October 1, 2015
CONTACT PERSON:	Steven Youngblood, LCSW-C Director, Foster Care Services 410-767-7695 Steven.youngblood@maryland.gov

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines to the Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) on documenting a child in out-of-home placement that is runaway/missing or abducted. This policy directive will provide a step by step instruction on documenting a runaway/missing or abducted child, monitoring the case, and procedure once the child is located.

This policy supersedes and replaces Policy SSA-CW# 14-5.

BACKGROUND:

A child that has not returned to their placement or living arrangement at a prearranged time and has not contacted the LDSS staff or the resource provider to inform them of a situation preventing the return at the prearranged time shall be considered to be runaway/missing. A child that informs the caseworker or resource provider that they are leaving the placement or living arrangement that the local department has approved and will not provide information of where they are going, is considered to be runaway. **If a child leaves an approved placement or living arrangement and the caseworker has knowledge of where the child is living, the child is not considered to be runaway/missing.** If the LDSS has knowledge of where the child is residing, the caseworker will make unannounced visits in an effort to have face to face contact with the child. A child that does not maintain curfew set by the resource provider, (depending on the age) is not considered to be a runaway/missing.

ACTION:

Steps to complete when a child is identified as runaway/missing or abducted:

The local department staff/caseworker shall follow the following steps when a child is determined to be runaway/missing or abducted:

- Immediately have the resource provider contact the police and file a runaway/missing persons report. If the resource provider cannot, it is the caseworker's responsibility to contact police and file a report. Whoever contacts the police shall request a police complaint number. This is to be completed for children regardless of age. If the child is over 18 years old and the police will not take a report the staff/caseworker shall document the attempt in MD CHESSIE. State and Federal law prohibits police from establishing any waiting period to accept a report for any missing youth.
- Caseworker shall obtain a copy of the report from the resource provider or the police department.
- Caseworker shall contact National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) by filing a missing child report on the designated NCMEC website **cmfc.missingkids.org**. Once entered on the website, the page should be printed and scanned into MD CHESSIE. The caseworker shall work with NCMEC on any additional information required.
- Caseworker shall supply the police department with an up-to-date picture of the child and ensure the police has entered the child in the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database.

- Caseworker shall immediately document in MD CHESSIE the child is on runaway. This shall be documented on the living arrangement screen, choosing the drop down of "Run Away".
- Caseworker shall compile information of the last whereabouts of the child.
- Caseworker shall notify the court and counsel.
- Caseworker shall notify parents/legal guardians (unless guardianship is granted to the LDSS).
- Caseworker shall contact the child's friends, employer, school staff, neighborhood acquaintances (placement and origin) to inquire about the child's whereabouts.

All these steps shall be completed within 24 hours of the child being reported as runaway/missing or abducted.

Case Management:

Once the initial steps for documenting a runaway/missing or abducted child have been taken, the caseworker shall do the following until the child returns or the out-of-home placement case is closed by the courts:

- Document weekly efforts to locate the child. These contacts shall be documented in MD CHESSIE and shall indicate all reasonable efforts the caseworker has made to locate the child. This includes: continuous conversations with family and friends, checking with the child's school, monitoring the child's social media regularly, calling and texting the child's cellular phone, emailing and visiting likely areas the child may be residing.
- Consult police/law enforcement weekly concerning progress towards locating the child and any leads the police may have discovered.
- Maintain contact with the resource provider. The placement can be held up to 30 days from the date the child left. The resource provider can be paid for up to 30 days if the placement is held. After 30 days the child shall be exited from the placement in MD CHESSIE.
- If information is discovered that the child may be residing in another State, contact the police in the State where it is believed the child is residing.

Once the child is located:

Once the child is located the caseworker shall:

- Ensure the child has transportation to the LDSS, if the child contacts the caseworker by phone to request assistance.
- Ensure transportation for the child to return back to the LDSS, if another agency or state locates the child. It is the LDSS's responsibility to ensure and pay for transportation. The caseworker shall contact the Compact Administrator for the Interstate Compact on Juveniles at the Department of Juvenile Services for assistance in returning the child.
- Notify court, counsel, and parents (unless guardianship is granted to the LDSS) that the child has been located.
- Notify police/law enforcement that the child has been located and ensure the child is removed from the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database.

- Notify NCMEC that the child has been located.
- Document in MD CHESSIE all information the child discloses concerning the factors that lead to their absence and their experiences and whereabouts while runaway/missing or abducted.
- Obtain a medical examination of the child within 24 hours of return.
- Complete a Safe-C OHP within 5 business days.
- Conduct a face to face contact with the child within 5 business days.

Within 5 business days of the child's return, the caseworker shall conduct a face-to-face visit with the child at the placement. During this visit, the caseworker shall have a conversation with the child concerning the reason(s) the child ran away, the child's experiences and where the child resided during the runaway/missing or abducted episode. The caseworker shall process with the child the reason(s) the child ran away and discuss accommodations that may prevent the child from running away again. The child may have multiple reasons for running away and the caseworker shall address each of the reasons. The caseworker shall ask specific questions as to where and with whom the child was residing, and how the child was taking care of him/herself. The caseworker shall also ask if the child has a "special friend" he/she was residing with during the runaway episode, the nature of the relationship and whether they felt safe. The caseworker shall make close observations to any evidence of physical abuse, substance abuse, or new tattoos/brands the child may have gotten while on runaway. The caseworker shall pay close attention to any unexplained purchases such as new clothes, cellular phone, sex paraphernalia, large amounts of cash or any other known indicators of possible sex trafficking victimization. **The discussion and all information must be documented in MD CHESSIE on a contact note.** In the child's case plan 2, the caseworker shall discuss how the LDSS has addressed the factors that led to the child's runaway episode. The caseworker shall also specifically address the services put in place for the child.

If during the conversation the caseworker suspects the child has been a victim of human sex trafficking or the child admits to being a victim of human sex trafficking, the caseworker shall immediately make a Child Protective Services report and notify the local law enforcement within 24 hours. For youth *suspected* of being victims; the caseworker shall refer the child for a full human trafficking assessment and for *confirmed* victims, the caseworker shall refer the child to appropriate specialized therapeutic services within 48 hours. Resources are available through the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at www.traffickingresources.org or 1-800-373-7888 and Turn Around, Inc. at http://www.turnaroundinc.org or 410-837-7000 (office) 443-279-0379 (24 hour Helpline).

DHR/SSA monitors children on runaway through a monthly report generated by MD CHESSIE. Caseworkers must maintain accurate information in MD CHESSIE specifically on the living arrangement screen selecting "runaway" and on contact notes pertaining to efforts to locate the child.