



Safe Haven Law Annual Report January 2022

**Pursuant to
HCR 107 - Louisiana 2016 Regular Session,
ACT 134 - Louisiana 2018 Regular Session,
and
ACT 421-Louisiana 2021 Regular Session**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As required by Louisiana Children's Code, Article 1160, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is submitting this report to both the House and Senate Committees on Health and Welfare regarding the Safe Haven Law.

A series of high-profile infant abandonment cases across the country prompted the Louisiana Legislature to combat the problem. In 2000, Louisiana enacted the Safe Haven Law, amending the Children's Code Articles 1101 and 1193 and Title XVII of the Children's Code, Articles 1701-1706, to provide for the Safe Haven relinquishment of newborns. That Code was again amended in 2003, 2018, and most recently in 2021. The entire Safe Haven Law, contained in LA Children's Code Chapter 13, Articles 1149-1160, provides a safe, legal, last resort alternative to abandonment.

Through House Concurrent Resolution 107 of the 2016 Legislative Session, a Safe Haven Consortium was formed of a select group of representative of emergency care facilities and key stakeholder groups to assist DCFS in developing and maintaining a registry of Safe Haven sites and to promote best practice related to the Safe Haven Law. DCFS assists in organizing and facilitating the Consortium meetings. Included in Section 6.0 of this report is a summary of the Consortium's activities and recommendations as required in the Resolution.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF DATA AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (then the Department of Social Services) implemented policies and procedures in 2004 relating to the state's Safe Haven Law. These policies and procedures have been updated by the agency each time the law was amended. Since 2004, 83 infants were safely relinquished through the Safe Haven Law at the point of initial contact with the State. The chart below provides details on the 83 successful relinquishments. In addition, there have not been any infant abandonment since February 2019 when a parent left an infant on the grounds of a hospital, but not in the hands of an employee.

Number of Safe Haven Cases CY 2004 - 2021																			
Region	Calendar Year																		
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Orleans	0	2	0	1	1	1	3	0	2	5	0	1	4	2	2	1	1	0	26
Baton Rouge	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	15
Covington	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	11
Thibodaux	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Lafayette	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	0	12
Lake Charles	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	6
Alexandria	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	4
Shreveport	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	7
Monroe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	2	2	1	4	2	3	6	2	4	11	2	5	6	5	6	9	9	4	83

*Note: Data is through December 1, 2021.

Safe Haven Cases from 2013-2021 by Receiving Emergency Designated Facility Type										
Receiving Emergency Designated Facility Type	Calendar Year									Total
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	
Licensed Hospitals upon birth of child	7	2	3	4	5	3	7	9	3	43
Other Licensed Hospitals	3	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	7
Fire Stations	1	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	1	6
Emergency Medical Service Providers (911)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Child Advocacy Centers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medical Clinics	0	0	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0
Public Health Units	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Law Enforcement Stations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Crisis Pregnancy Centers	0	0	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0
Licensed Rural Health Clinics	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0	0	0
Licensed Ambulatory Surgical Centers	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0	0	0
Federally Qualified Health Units	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	11	2	5	6	5	6	9	9	4	57
*Please note that Crisis Pregnancy Centers are no longer Safe Haven Sites and Licensed Rural Health Clinics, Licensed Ambulatory Surgical Centers, and Federally Qualified Health Units have been added.										

*Note: Data is through December 1, 2021.

3.0 PROGRAMMATIC UPDATES

Louisiana has made great strides in implementing best practice with Safe Haven relinquishments, ultimately resulting in changes in the law, increased public awareness efforts, revisions in training for Safe Haven providers, and modification of signage and brochures intended to educate and spread awareness of the Safe Haven relinquishment option. In addition, in 2020 a Safe Haven video was developed, which highlights Louisiana’s partnership with the National Safe Haven Alliance and the options it offers new and expectant mothers at risk of abandoning their babies. The video can be found at <http://www.dcfslouisiana.gov/page/safe-haven-video>.

During the 2019 legislative session, a bill was proposed by Representative Pylant to implement Safe Haven newborn safety devices (baby boxes) in Louisiana. In general, baby boxes are devices that are installed in the wall of a Safe Haven site that allow a parent to relinquish an infant anonymously without face-to-face contact with a person. There is one primary manufacturer and distributor of the baby box, with other alternatives available. The proposed legislation did not pass. A similar bill was proposed by Representative Huval in 2020 legislative session, but did not move forward due to COVID-19 limitations.

In September 2020, DCFS partnered with the National Safe Haven Alliance(NSHA) to offer a 24/7 Hotline staffed by highly trained crisis response experts using a holistic approach to help parents who are considering relinquishing their baby under the Louisiana’s Safe Haven Law. The NSHA crisis response team uses a three-tiered approach to walk callers through their options-including parenting, adoption, and relinquishment-and establish a plan to fit their needs. New parents may

believe they are unable to parent their baby due to extenuating circumstances. NSHA's experts can help navigate callers through those challenges and prepare for parenthood, or if desired, connect them to an adoption agency within the state. If neither parenting nor adoption is an option, the team can help the parent prepare for a safe and legal relinquishment of the baby to an authorized Safe Haven site employee or 911 dispatched responders.

During the 2021 legislative session, a bill was proposed by Representative Huval and passed in regards to Safe Haven baby boxes. Act 421 allows for implementation of Safe Haven baby boxes inside of a licensed hospital in accordance with the Hospital Licensing Law, R.S. 40:2100 et seq., and has an emergency department that is staffed twenty-four hours per day. To date, there are no installed baby boxes in Louisiana and the Louisiana Department of Health is currently promulgating rules and regulations for the boxes. Best practice is for a parent to relinquish to a person, ultimately ensuring the immediate medical care and safety of the newborn while allowing support/medical for the mother/parent if needed. By promoting the surrender of a newborn with a person, there is often the opportunity to discuss other options that may allow a holistic approach to enable parenting, temporary placement, or adoption planning. Surrendering to a trained professional ensures the relinquishing parent is giving informed consent for her child to be adopted. However, the use of Safe Haven devices/boxes provides an additional opportunity for surrender of the relinquishing parent.

4.0 SAFE HAVEN PUBLIC AWARENESS

ACTIVITIES TO DATE

In February 2009, DCFS launched a statewide public awareness campaign for Louisiana's Safe Haven Law. The campaign featured billboards, brochures, public service announcements for radio and television, and the creation of a website (www.louisianasafehaven.com). The Department also designed posters, business cards, and window decals for Safe Haven facilities. In July 2009, an online form was created for Safe Haven facilities to request materials for their Safe Haven site.

Since 2009, DCFS has appeared in radio, television, and newspaper reports bringing awareness to Louisiana's Safe Haven Law as an alternative to abandonment. The Department also periodically issued news releases about relinquishments and updates to the Safe Haven Law. The issue has been the focus of intense media coverage in instances of infant abandonments, some resulting in tragedy or near-tragedy. The Department has responded through proactive media outreach and response, as well as postings to the department's Facebook and Twitter accounts (www.twitter.com/LouisianaDCFS and www.facebook.com/LADCFS), all in an effort to inform the public about the safe, legal alternative to infant abandonment.

In 2013, when the relinquishment age was changed to 60 days old, redesigned brochures and posters were printed. Updated packets of posters, brochures, cards and decals were then mailed to Louisiana Safe Haven facilities.

In 2017 there was an increase in the requests from Safe Haven sites for publications on Safe Haven. In 2017, DCFS distributed at least 88 packets of information, as compared to 42 in 2016.

The packets are individualized, but contain such information as posters, decals, brochures and cards.

In May 2017, DCFS updated its Safe Haven brochure to reflect changes in the law.

In October 2017, the department launched an online mapping tool designed to help the public locate hospitals, fire stations and other facilities where they can legally relinquish a newborn through the Safe Haven Law. Both the Safe Haven “locator” and the updated brochure were funded through a grant by the Children’s Trust Fund. In addition, DCFS updated its online training video for Safe Haven providers.

DCFS made the launch of the mapping tool the focus of a public awareness campaign in October 2017 and of media outreach in 2018, as the Communications Office used news of child abandonments as opportunities to share information about the Safe Haven Law.

In addition to conducting interviews and providing Safe Haven information to the media, DCFS updated and reprinted Safe Haven materials in 2018. The Communications Office revised and ordered new Safe Haven brochures, information cards and posters in October 2018. It updated the Safe Haven listings in the mapping tool. And, as part of a department-wide website redesign project, it enhanced its online Safe Haven resources, including information about the Safe Haven Law.

In 2019, the DCFS Communications Office ran a social media campaign on Safe Haven, highlighting the online Safe Haven facility locator, the requirement that a baby be relinquished into the hands of a Safe Haven employee, and the fact that relinquishments are confidential, allowing the parent to remain anonymous.

In the fall of 2020, the department promoted the state’s partnership with the National Safe Haven Alliance 24-hour Crisis Hotline with a press release, media outreach and a social media campaign. Its crowning achievement was the production of a brief animated video, explaining the Safe Haven law and the options presented to mothers when they contact the National Safe Haven Alliance Hotline and visit LouisianaSafeHaven.com on the DCFS website.

DCFS continued its promotion of the National Safe Haven Alliance partnership and animated video in 2021. The department invited and encouraged Safe Haven Consortium members to co-brand or re-brand the video for their own organizations and to present it in public appearances and display it in public locations. One organization, Louisiana Right to Life, did that.

The primary means of publicity in 2021 included utilizing social media to promote Safe Haven information, the video, and the National Safe Haven Alliance 24-hour Crisis Hotline. Posts to Facebook and Twitter yielded 11,384 Twitter impressions and a Facebook reach of 4,480 individuals. Internet sites devoted to Louisiana’s Safe Haven law involved 11,157 page views and 9,280 unique page views. The top three pages were the DCFS Safe Haven home page, “About Safe Haven” and the Safe Haven Directory.

DCFS updated all materials (brochure, etc.) to reflect the emphasis on the National Safe Haven Alliance partnership.

5.0 COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Objective

The Department of Children and Family Services will continue to utilize the Safe Haven Alliance and video as the centerpiece of its 2022 public information efforts through the strategies listed below.

The department will support the Safe Haven Consortium in its efforts to ensure Safe Haven materials are available to stakeholders.

Target Audiences

- Louisiana Safe Haven Consortium members – This diverse group includes DCFS partners who share the department’s commitment to reduce infant abandonment and increase the awareness of options.
- General Public – This includes anyone who might benefit from knowledge of the Safe Haven law and ways to access it, among them are DCFS clients – individuals receiving a variety of services from the agency.
- Key Mandated Reporters – This includes teachers, health care workers, counselors and others who deal with potential Safe Haven Program beneficiaries.
- Policy Makers and Stakeholders – DCFS stakeholders include the Administration, state Legislature, state partner agencies and nonprofit organizations that would benefit from Safe Haven information.
- Safe Haven Relinquishment Sites – This includes licensed hospitals, local or parish public health units, licensed rural health units, licensed rural health clinics, licensed ambulatory surgical centers, Federally Qualified Health Centers, emergency medical service providers, fire stations, law enforcement stations, and child advocacy centers accredited by the National Children’s Alliance.

Strategies

Promotional Strategies would include but not be limited to the following:

- Updating and enhancing the DCFS website to support all communications
- Promoting co-branding or re-branding of the video by partners to increase the likelihood of its adoption, use and promotion
- Using social media and traditional media to increase awareness
- Purchasing social media advertising
- Presenting the video to legislators and other opinion leaders
- Highlighting the video through targeted industry (i.e. nursing, education) presentations

Monitoring Outcomes

- DCFS will use social media and website analytics to track the effectiveness of communication efforts and gauge engagement.
- The department will monitor media coverage of Safe Haven press releases and related promotions to ensure accuracy of reporting and determine public engagement resulting from the efforts.
- Requests for printed materials will be monitored and tracked for future print orders. Inquiries from legislators and other stakeholders in regards to the Safe Haven Law will also be tracked.

6.0 REPORT FROM THE SAFE HAVEN CONSORTIUM

The Safe Haven Consortium is comprised of representatives from the Louisiana Department of Health; Louisiana Hospital Association; Louisiana Emergency Response Network; Louisiana Ambulance Alliance; Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners; Louisiana State Board of Nursing; Professional Fire Fighters Association of Louisiana; Louisiana Fire Chiefs Association; Louisiana Sheriffs' Association; Louisiana Association of Chiefs of Police; Louisiana Peace Officers Association; Louisiana State Troopers Association; Magnolia State Peace Officers Association of Louisiana; Children's Advocacy Centers of Louisiana; National Association of Social Workers, Louisiana Chapter; Louisiana School Boards Association; Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools; Louisiana Association of Educators; Louisiana Federation of Teachers; and Louisiana Association of Student Councils. Participation in Consortium meetings has not occurred by many of the agencies listed.

Additional Stakeholder groups that participate in the Consortium meetings include the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services, the Louisiana Department of Education, Louisiana CASA, Louisiana Right to Life, and Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families.

The Consortium's chairperson is Caroline Roemer, with the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools; and the vice chairperson is Paige Hargrove, with the Louisiana Emergency Response Network.

One Consortium meeting was held in 2021 with the focus continuing to be on increasing public awareness in regards to Safe Haven. During the 2021 Senate Committee Meeting on ACT 421, Senator Mizell encouraged DCFS to increase public awareness by targeting WIC recipients. The Consortium will focus next year on encouraging all health units to have Safe Haven material posted and available for WIC recipients as health units are designated Safe Haven sites. In addition, the Consortium will focus next year on designing and distributing a new Safe Haven pamphlet to other agencies and providers (ex. OBGYN) that is geared toward the other options parents have available to them through the assistance of the National Safe Haven Alliance Hotline along with the Safe Haven option. Also, DCFS released a Safe Haven video and many of the Safe Haven Consortium members and participants shared the video within their agencies and other

stakeholders. Louisiana Right to Life cobranding the video as well. The Safe Haven Consortium members and participants will continue to focus on sharing the video this year throughout the state. After much discussion during the 2021 legislative session, Act 421 passed that allows for installation of Safe Haven Baby boxes in licensed hospitals. During committee testimony, concern was expressed about the possibility of a Human Trafficking victim being forced to relinquish their child by their trafficker through a Safe Haven Baby Box. To date, there are no installed baby boxes in Louisiana and LDH is currently working on promulgating rules and regulations for the boxes. The Consortium recommends that if DCFS learns of a human trafficking victim being forced to relinquish their newborn in a Baby Box, that DCFS ensures Law Enforcement is notified, along with reporting the findings in the Safe Haven Annual report to the legislature. In addition, DCFS will notify the judge on the DCFS case of the findings. If it is also learned that this is becoming a pattern, the Safe Haven Consortium will consider recommending legislative changes.