

Agency Snapshot: Florida Department of Children and Families

By Stephen Emmanuel

The Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) was created in 1996 when the Legislature divided the former Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services into two new departments: DCF and the Florida Department of Health. The mission of DCF is to protect the vulnerable, promote strong and economically self-sufficient families, and advance personal and family recovery and resiliency. DCF provides services through a number of different programs and offices such as the Adult Protective Services Program (charged with protecting vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect, or exploitation), the Office of Child Care Regulation (which licenses child care facilities and day care homes), the Office of Child Welfare (charged with protecting children from abuse or neglect), Children's Legal Services (which handles dependency proceedings under chapter 39, Florida Statutes, when it is determined that a child has been abused, abandoned, or neglected), the Domestic Violence Program (which operates as a clearinghouse for state and federal funding initiatives for the prevention and intervention of domestic violence), the Economic Self-Sufficiency Program (which assists in determining eligibility for food and medical assistance), the Refugee Service Program (a federally funded program that assists in resettling refugees), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Program (which provides oversight of a statewide system of care for the prevention and treatment of children and adults suffering from mental illness or substance abuse), and the Office on Homelessness (which works with state and local agencies to help individuals or families facing homelessness).

Agency Secretary: Chad Poppell

Mr. Poppell came to Tallahassee from Jacksonville in 2013. He previously served as the chief of staff for the Department of Economic Opportunity and then as the Secretary of the Department of Management Services. Following a brief time in the private sector, Governor DeSantis charged him to lead DCF.

Agency Clerk: Lacey Kantor

Agency Clerk's Mailing Address/Location:

Office of the General Counsel
Department of Children and Families
1317 Winewood Boulevard,
Building 2, Room 204
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0700

Hours for Filings:

8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

General Counsel:

Javier Enriquez

Prior to becoming the general counsel for DCF, Mr. Enriquez worked in the private sector, representing clients in family, guardianship, civil and employment litigation matters. For nearly a decade, he has been a non-profit leader in South Florida, dedicating much of his free time to serving his community.

A native of Miami, he is fluent in both English and Spanish. Mr. Enriquez earned his Bachelor's, Master's in Public Administration, and Juris Doctor degrees from the University of Miami.

Number of Lawyers on Staff:

There are approximately 308 lawyers on staff at DCF with approximately 205 support staff. DCF's

attorneys provide legal advice and representation to its programs and staff in 16 locations.

Kinds of Cases: Administrative and Dependency

Administrative: The Office of General Counsel is the statewide legal office for DCF. It provides legal advice and representation to all of DCF's programs, institutions and administrative staff throughout Florida. The lawyers of the Office of General Counsel provide legal counsel to the Secretary, management and all DCF employees. The Office also gives advice regarding DCF to the Legislature, Governor, cabinet members, the court system, and other state and local governmental agencies. DCF lawyers have expertise in the following areas, among others: health and human services; contracts; litigation; constitutional and statutory law; public records and the Sunshine Law; ethics; government procurement; administrative law; appeals; and human resources.

Dependency: Children's Legal Services (CLS) represents the State of Florida through DCF to ensure the health and safety of children and the integrity of families. Working with other department programs and community stakeholders, CLS advocates for the safety, well-being, and permanency of Florida's abused, abandoned, and neglected children.

Practice Tips

For legal questions regarding the responsibilities of DCF, contact the Office of the General Counsel, Florida Department of Children and Families, 1317 Winewood Blvd. Building 2, Rm. 204, Tallahassee, FL 32399, 850-488-2381 (Work), 850-922-3947 (Fax).

