

DHSS Legislative Contacts

Throughout the year, but especially during the legislative session, legislative offices contact DHSS staff for information.

Legislative inquiries occur:

- Legislative staff or legislators may call staff directly
- Division or Commissioner's legislative liaison and staff ask an employee to respond to an inquiry
- Designated employees are assigned to discuss legislation or department issues with legislative offices, or testify before legislative committees.

Responding to inquiries: If you receive such an inquiry, it is best to work with your division legislative liaison, supervisor, and/or division director to determine the best person to respond to the inquiry. In some cases, depending on the specific inquiry, the response will be delegated to the Commissioner's office. In many cases, the Division Director or his/her designee will be the spokesperson on specific legislation, an issue, or division budget during the legislative session.

Communicating the response to the Commissioner's office: It is critical for the Director's office and Commissioner's office to know what has been previously communicated to legislative offices. Legislative liaisons (Division and DHSS Commissioner's office), Division Directors, the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners will visit the Capitol frequently and are asked questions on policy issues, program operations, constituent matters, etc. If division staff have already communicated information to a legislative office, it is important for the Commissioner's office and Division Director to have that information before we engage in a conversation with a legislator or staff on the same subject. This allows the Commissioner's office to support the divisions and makes it clear that we, as a department, are all on the same page. The legislative contact form should be used to report these contacts; a new Web-based system is under development and will soon replace the form.

Budget Questions: The above procedure applies to all legislative inquiries **EXCEPT BUDGET QUESTIONS**. The DHSS Finance Management Services has a more formal tracking system for budget-related questions, and they are the best authority to answer budget- and finance-related questions.

The best person to respond: This is not a gag order on employees. Staff should always feel empowered to answer legislative inquiries that are within their expertise/position. If an employee does not know the answer, feel uncomfortable answering, or it is a difficult policy issue, the employee should ask their supervisor and/or division legislative liaison to follow up with the legislative office.

Timeliness is key: It is far more important for us to get a quick summary of what was said to a legislative office than a well-written "report" that arrives days later. Staff legislative contact summaries should immediately be sent to Division Director's offices/Division legislative liaison, and then forwarded to the Commissioner's legislative staff: Sherry Hill and Elmer Lindstrom.

Speaking on your own behalf: Employees always have the right to speak to legislative offices on their own time about any matter, as any other citizen. However, if an employee wishes to offer personal opinions on legislation, testify before committees, etc., they should put in for leave to do so if it is during regular working hours.