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PURPOSE:

This document establishes policies and procedures to assure that concerns of people who receive services and supports or representatives acting on their behalf are handled appropriately.

Concerns may be related to services, supports, or programs operated or funded by the South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs (DDSN), a DDSN Regional Center, a DSN Board, or contracted service provider, but are not those concerns that rise to the level of critical incident, abuse, neglect or exploitation as defined by DDSN policy or adverse decisions that can be appealed or reconsidered in accordance with DDSN Policy.

Contacts typically are made when the person who receives services or their representative feels their concern has not been satisfied through informal or routine contact with staff directly associated with the service, support or program. Contact with someone outside of the situation provides an opportunity for objective and impartial review of the concern.

POLICY

All providers will have a procedure for people who receive services and supports or representatives acting in their behalf that assures their right to voice concerns without actions being taken against them for doing so. The procedure will be reflective of the values and

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principles of DDSN and will clearly delineate all steps in the process. People who receive services and their representatives will be provided with information about the process in a manner that is understandable to the person. Support will be provided, if needed to people who wish to express a concern but need assistance in understanding or following the process.

All efforts will be made to resolve concerns at the most immediate staff level that can properly address the concern. Efforts will be made to promote trust and open communication at the local service level whenever possible.

Concerns involving health and safety of people receiving services will receive immediate review and necessary action will be taken if the person's health or safety is at risk.

PROCEDURES

People who receive services and/or their representatives expressing concerns should be encouraged to seek remediation through their direct service provider's policy regarding concerns.

If the concern is unable to be resolved at this level, then the matter should be referred to the DDSN Office of Consumer Affairs or the appropriate District Director.

Follow-up to a concern will include contact with the person or representative expressing the concern, review and research of the concern, efforts to mediate resolution, and documentation of all actions taken. The nature of the concern and the needs of the individual will factor into the time period required for response, but generally, responses are provided within ten (10) business days.

Facility Directors/Executive Directors/CEOs will be notified whenever a consumer concern involves their service area.

Concerns generating media contacts will be coordinated through procedures as outlined in DDSN Directive133-01-DD: Media and Publications Policies.

Critical incidents and allegations of abuse shall be reported as outlined in DDSN Directive100-09-DD: Critical Incident Reporting and DDSN Directive 534-02-DD: Procedures for Preventing and Reporting Abuse, Neglect, or Exploitation of People Receiving Services from DDSN or a Contracted Provider Agency. Adverse decisions shall be handled in accordance with DDSN Directive 535-11-DD: Appeal and Reconsideration Policy and Procedure.

Legislative contacts that rise to the level of DDSN Office of Consumer Affairs will be referred to the Director of Government and Community Relations to coordinate with the appropriate Division or District Director for response and follow-up.

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