



**Services and Resources Committee of the
Statewide Council on Human Trafficking**

Adult Safe Houses Final Report

Department of Children and Families
Office of Child and Family Well-Being
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Services and Resources Committee of the Statewide Council on Human Trafficking

Final report on the activities of the workgroup conducting a study regarding the regulations of adult safe houses.

Introduction

Chapter 2023-85, Laws of Florida (SB 1690, 2023) created section 402.881, Florida Statutes (F.S.). The new statute defines “adult safe house” as a group residential facility that provides housing and care specifically for adult survivors of human trafficking. The law defines “Adult survivor of human trafficking” or “survivor” as an individual who has reached the age of 18 and who has been subjected to human trafficking as defined in section 787.06, F.S.

The Committee submitted an interim report regarding its activities and findings on October 1, 2023, to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. As part of that report, the Committee provided the results of a study and of a survey of existing adult safe house providers.

This final report focuses on the best practice recommendations for regulation of adult safe houses in Florida based on information obtained by the Committee.

Recommendations for Certification Standards Adult Safe House Certification implemented by Department of Children and Families (Department). Through collaboration with survivors, providers of adult safe houses, and national experts, the following recommendations are made to guide the formalization of a certification process in Florida:

1. The certification approval process should consider allowing agencies to provide the Department with a self-assessment for certain categories. The Department is exploring use of accreditation standards to satisfy certain certification components.
2. The certification process should allow providers to follow the background screening exemption process under Chapter 435, F.S.
3. The Department should provide a minimum of six (6) months for safe houses to obtain certification.
4. The Department should provide the adult safe house network with technical assistance and support.

Recommended Standards for Adult Safe House Certification

Certification credentials will clearly state the types of housing provided by the organization:

- Short-term/emergency housing
- Long-term/transitional housing

The following recommendations will be utilized to develop certification rules and detail expectations for certified providers.

Governance

- A Board of Directors that is responsible for developing and adopting policies, managing a budget, and providing organizational oversight.
- Transparent financial practices that are open to required audits and board reviews.
- Core Values are established and communicated to all residents, staff, and volunteers.
- Written code of conduct for employees that is available to all staff.
- The organization's code of conduct, policies, procedures, and protocols are included in the onboarding packet for each employee.
- Materials detailing program policies, operating procedures, corrective action plans, code of conduct for residents, and grievance protocols are included in the intake package provided and discussed with each resident upon acceptance to the program.
- Compliance with all applicable federal and state employment laws and regulations.
- Actions that solicits and incorporates input from survivors of trafficking regarding organizational policies, protocols, program design, and governance.

Safety, Security, and Confidentiality

- The physical structure of the house is safe and appropriate for residential services.
- The privacy and confidentiality of survivors is secure through a location with limited public access and appropriate security measures.
- Safety and security measures are taken within and around homes (examples include cameras in common areas, fences as appropriate, security staff or systems). The use of cameras and purpose must be explained to survivors and included in written policies.
- All staff and volunteers who have contact with residents or confidential records shall complete a Level II background screening and at a minimum are rescreened every five years.
- Written emergency response protocols are in place and staff are trained on crisis intervention techniques including CPR, first aid, and medication administration.
- Regular safety inspections/drills with documented results and updates including but not limited to fire alarms, hurricane preparedness, and pest control.

- Security of all physical and electronic confidential information and communications related to residents and staff, including but not limited to, storing all files in secure locations, using secure electronic communication platforms, signing confidentiality agreements protecting residents' confidentiality and privacy with all staff, volunteers, and visitors.
- Staff-to-resident ratio not to exceed 1:20.

Trauma-informed Survivor-centered Service Delivery

- Trauma-informed/responsive environment that acknowledges the unique experiences and needs of survivors.
- Therapeutic, supportive environment that is survivor-centered.
- Clear written policies regarding acceptance eligibility, intake and discharge procedures, and services available. These policies are discussed at the time of intake and written copies are provided to each resident.
- Use of trauma-informed language in all written materials, verbal and written communications, trainings, and everyday activities.
- Guide survivors in developing an individualized care plan that addresses survivor's immediate safety, physical and mental health needs, education, employment, and long-term goals.
- Services provided according to the care plan that remain responsive to survivors' evolving needs.
- Safe transportation for survivors to access services and other needs.
- Dedicated care manager or advocate to each survivor.
- Collaboration with local organizations and community resources to ensure survivors have access to trauma specific services including:
 - Emergency medical care.
 - Ongoing healthcare, vision, dental, legal services, educational opportunities, and employment support.
 - Behavioral Health services including individual and/or group options, substance use treatment, mental health treatment.
- Assistance to survivors in developing plans for safe transitioning out of the program.
- Meeting survivors' basic physical needs for safe and appropriate shelter, food, clothing, and hygiene. The provider does not withhold survivor access to necessities.
- Stories or testimonials of survivors are not used without consent, or while a survivor is a resident of the program.
- Protect the confidentiality and well-being of residents and document protection in written policies.
- Obtains and responds to survivors' feedback on an ongoing basis and through exit surveys.

Staff Training and Advocacy

- All staff receive 40-hours of onboarding training of which 24-hours will be focused on human trafficking or related topics. With Department approval, the provider may choose a training curriculum that meets this requirement.
- Direct Care Staff may be certified as Human Trafficking (HT) Victim Advocates. The certification is granted by the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) to persons who complete the OAG Human Trafficking Victim Advocate 24-hour Training.
- All staff receive 10 hours of ongoing annual training on human trafficking efforts and related topics.

Community Collaboration and Law Enforcement Coordination

- Partnerships with community providers to develop a coordinated system of care for survivors. Examples of community providers include legal aid, healthcare providers, service providers, etc.
- Active engagement with community stakeholders to raise awareness about anti-human trafficking efforts to prevent future victimization.
- Participation as an active member of the local anti-trafficking task force, coalition, or collaborative. The provider's good standing is verified annually.
- Agreement(s) with local, state, and/or federal law enforcement agencies to demonstrate collaboration and coordination to serve survivors. These agreements should include the referral process, interview locations and advocate presence, and emergency contact protocol.
- Provide education to community partners about the safe house's mission; provides appropriate training on human trafficking and trauma response as needed or requested.
- Immediately report any suspected abuse, neglect, or human trafficking of vulnerable adults or minors to the Florida Abuse Hotline and/or law enforcement.

Children and Special Abilities

- Written policies detailing supervision, schooling, and services available to minors when accepting survivors with children or other dependents.
- When accepting survivors with special abilities, be fully capable of meeting those needs including hiring additional staff with expertise in serving this population and/or coordination with agencies or providers with expertise in this area.

Conclusion

The legislation expanding certification standards for adult safe houses will solidify the state's efforts to protect survivors of human trafficking and provide them with the highest level of care available. The certification process and associated policies will ensure that the standards are delivered as intended by this legislation. Survivors and subject matter experts have underscored their strong support for a uniform statewide certification process for licensing adult safe houses.

The Department will commence the rule development in January 2024, and anticipates the certification process available for providers by July 2024.