



Adult Protective Services Takes Steps to Improve Coordination with Local Law Enforcement Agencies

at a glance

The Department of Children and Families' Adult Protective Services units have signed working agreements with all but one of the state's 346 local law enforcement agencies. Some of these agreements have lapsed but are being renewed. Several of the department's service districts have taken additional steps to improve cooperation and coordination with local law enforcement agencies, including providing in-service training and designating points of contact. The department's central office should meet with state law enforcement associations to establish statewide policies to promote coordination between the program and local law enforcement agencies.

Scope

In accordance with state law, this progress report informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Department of Children and Families in response to the findings and recommendations in OPPAGA's 2004 report on the Adult Protective Services Program's working agreements with local law enforcement.^{1, 2}

Background

The Department of Children and Families' Adult Protective Services Program provides services to protect vulnerable adults.³ These services include protective investigations, case management, and referrals for long-term services for adults who may experience abuse, neglect, or exploitation by second parties or who fail to take care of themselves adequately.

The program's central office in Tallahassee is responsible for administrative and policy development functions.⁴ The program delivers services through 13 district offices and the SunCoast region, which oversee local adult protective investigative units. Adult protective investigators investigate abuse reports taken by the department's central abuse hotline to determine whether there is evidence of abuse, neglect, or exploitation; whether there is an immediate or long-term risk to the victim; and whether the victim needs services to safeguard his or her well-being.⁵

³ Section 415.102(26), *F.S.*, defines vulnerable adult as "a person 18 years of age or older whose ability to perform the normal activities of daily living or to provide for his or her own care or protection is impaired due to a mental, emotional, long-term physical, or developmental disability or dysfunction, or brain damage, or the infirmities of aging."

⁴ These functions include planning, budgeting, quality assurance, and maintaining the program's management information system.

⁵ Florida statutes require any person who knows or has reasonable cause to suspect any abuse, neglect, or exploitation of vulnerable adults to report that information to the Florida Abuse Hotline. Hotline employees screen these calls to determine whether the information meets the criteria for an abuse report and refer such calls to the program.

¹ Section 11.51(6), *F.S.*

² *Most Adult Protection Working Agreements Signed, But Have Had Limited Effectiveness*, [Report No. 04-73](#), October 2004.

In Fiscal Year 2004-05, the Adult Protective Services Program conducted 41,028 adult protective investigations. The Legislature appropriated \$43.3 million and authorized 596.5 positions to operate this program in Fiscal Year 2005-06.⁶

Law enforcement role and working agreements. It is important for adult protective investigators to have effective working relationships with local law enforcement agencies. Investigators may require law enforcement assistance if emergency access is needed to a vulnerable adult, a caregiver attempts to prevent or interfere with an investigation, or a vulnerable adult must be moved and medical transportation is either unavailable or not needed. Program staff are required to immediately notify law enforcement if they believe that abuse, neglect, or exploitation has been perpetrated by a second party. The agencies are to coordinate to ensure that criminal and protective investigations do not hinder one another and share information when possible.

To encourage such cooperation and coordination, the 2000 Legislature required the program to establish working agreements with county sheriffs' offices and local police departments.⁷ However, in 2003, OPPAGA reported that the program had signed local working agreements with only 129 of the state's 346 law enforcement agencies.⁸ The 2003 Legislature subsequently mandated the department to sign working agreements with all local law enforcement agencies by March 1, 2004.⁹ In October 2004, OPPAGA reported that the program had signed working agreements with 342 law enforcement agencies, but several coordination problems existed that could delay service provision and hinder criminal investigations.

Current Status

The department now has established working agreements with all but one local law enforcement agency, although some agreements have lapsed and are being renewed. Some districts also have

taken additional steps to improve cooperation and coordination with local law enforcement.

Initial working agreements have been signed, but some have since expired

As of May 2006, the program had signed initial working agreements with all but one of Florida's 346 local law enforcement agencies.¹⁰ However, seven of these agreements have lapsed and have not yet been renewed.¹¹ District offices reported that they are in the process of renewing these agreements, which had been delayed by staff changes and other workload demands.

Program administrators stated that some working agreements are subject to expiration dates while others do not have such deadlines. Most working agreements allow either party to end the agreement with 30 days notice, but otherwise the agreements do not expire. However, some districts negotiated specific time frames for all or some of their working agreements. Although districts with time-limited working agreements have had more difficulty keeping the agreements up to date, this may encourage staff to review and update these agreements more frequently.

Some districts implemented additional initiatives to improve cooperation and coordination

The working agreements have had some positive benefits, such as raising awareness of abuse, neglect, and exploitation among law enforcement agencies and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each agency. However, at the time of our prior report, stakeholders reported that some areas of the state continued to experience coordination problems between adult protective investigators and local law enforcement.¹² To help address these problems,

⁶ This appropriation includes department services for adult protection as well as case management services for certain qualifying disabled adults.

⁷ Chapter 2000-349, *Laws of Florida*.

⁸ *Improvements Needed in the Department of Children and Families Adult Services Program*, [Report No. 03-08](#), January 2003.

⁹ Chapter 2003-262, *Laws of Florida*.

¹⁰ Department administrators report that the Gulf Breeze Police Department has declined to sign a working agreement with any agency, although the local adult protective investigators have a good working relationship with Gulf Breeze police officers.

¹¹ Six of these lapsed agreements are from District 14 which serves Polk, Hardee and Highlands counties.

¹² Participants in focus groups and interviews gave examples of problems that sometimes occurred despite having working agreements, including law enforcement personnel being unwilling to enter a home in cases of emergency or adult protective investigators not reporting possible criminal cases in a timely manner.

some of the department's districts have taken supplemental steps to improve coordination.

- Five districts and the SunCoast Region have offered in-service training for investigators and/or law enforcement officers on their respective roles and responsibilities, which district staff indicated had improved working relationships. Two districts and the region also have participated in other types of training with law enforcement. For example, District 4 (Jacksonville area) assisted other local agencies in developing an interactive CD related to domestic violence and elder abuse. The CD allows self-directed training and the district anticipates it will make this CD available statewide. The remaining districts reported that they have not offered such training due to scheduling conflicts, limited local interest, or limited resources to develop and implement such training.
- One district has incorporated a local investigative protocol into its working agreement with a law enforcement agency since our prior report.¹³ Local protocols define how each agency is to communicate and collaborate in investigations. Most districts reported that the standard working agreements have been sufficient and locally modified protocols are not needed.
- All districts and the region report having established points of contact with law enforcement, either through the working agreements or through other contact information exchanged with law enforcement agencies. These points of contact designate specific individuals that should be contacted to resolve questions and problems.

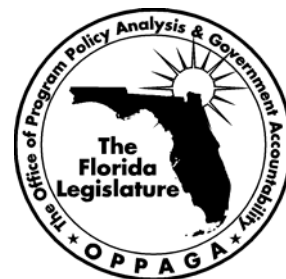
Although none of the districts or the region have held meetings with law enforcement to discuss their overall working relationships, all reported meeting with local agencies to discuss specific cases. District staff report that these case-specific meetings provide adequate opportunities to develop good working relationships.

Central program office staff should meet with sheriff and police associations to discuss statewide policies. To improve cooperation and coordination at the state level, we continue to recommend that the central Adult Protective Services Program office meet periodically with the Florida Sheriffs Association and Florida Police Chiefs Association to discuss and implement statewide policies to guide local law enforcement and adult protection units in establishing their own protocols. Central office staff report they have not sought to hold such meetings to date due to staffing losses following the department's recent reorganization.

¹³ Districts 7, 10, 11, and 12 have had such local protocols for several years. The department has recently established an agreement with the Polk County Sheriff's Office that includes such protocols; this agreement is being renewed and awaiting signatures.

The Florida Legislature

Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability



Visit the [Florida Monitor](http://www.floridamonitor.com), OPPAGA's online service. See www.oppaga.state.fl.us. This site monitors the performance and accountability of Florida government by making OPPAGA's four primary products available online.

- [OPPAGA publications and contracted reviews](#), such as policy analyses and performance reviews, assess the efficiency and effectiveness of state policies and programs and recommend improvements for Florida government.
- [Performance-based program budgeting \(PB²\) reports and information](#) offer a variety of tools. Program evaluation and justification reviews assess state programs operating under performance-based program budgeting. Also offered are performance measures information and our assessments of measures.
- [Florida Government Accountability Report \(FGAR\)](#) is an Internet encyclopedia of Florida state government. FGAR offers concise information about state programs, policy issues, and performance.
- [Best Financial Management Practices Reviews of Florida school districts](#). In accordance with the *Sharpening the Pencil Act*, OPPAGA and the Auditor General jointly conduct reviews to determine if a school district is using best financial management practices to help school districts meet the challenge of educating their students in a cost-efficient manner.

Subscribe to OPPAGA's electronic newsletter, [Florida Monitor Weekly](#), a free source for brief e-mail announcements of research reports, conferences, and other resources of interest for Florida's policy research and program evaluation community.

OPPAGA supports the Florida Legislature by providing evaluative research and objective analyses to promote government accountability and the efficient and effective use of public resources. This project was conducted in accordance with applicable evaluation standards. Copies of this report in print or alternate accessible format may be obtained by telephone (850/488-0021 or 800/531-2477), by FAX (850/487-3804), in person, or by mail (OPPAGA Report Production, Claude Pepper Building, Room 312, 111 W. Madison St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1475). Cover photo by Mark Foley.

Florida Monitor: www.oppaga.state.fl.us

Project supervised by Nancy Dufoe (850/487-9242)

Project conducted by Rae Hendlin (850/410-4795)

Becky Vickers, Staff Director (850/487-1316)

Gary R. VanLandingham, OPPAGA Director