

**MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM, GOVERNOR**

Brian Blalock, Cabinet Secretary

Terry Locke, Deputy Secretary

*Improving the Quality of Life for Our Children.***NEWS RELEASE***For Immediate Release***December 28, 2020**

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**Introducing Reach NM: A New Way for Youth to Reach CYFD***Text-based reporting service available to all NM youth*

**SANTA FE** – New Mexico Children, Youth & Families Department launched ReachNM, a new program that enables youth to contact the department's Statewide Central Intake workers by texting 505-591-9444 to seek support and resources or report suspected abuse or neglect.

New Mexico is the first state to create a system where reports of child abuse and neglect may be taken completely by text message.

ReachNM makes specially trained personnel available to answer questions from youth and connect them with the support they need 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The average child now has a cell phone by age 11 and texting is their most comfortable form of communication, according to Arizona State University research.

"We know that children are the experts in their own lives and being able to communicate with a young person in a way they're most comfortable is key to assessing a child's needs," said CYFD Secretary Brian Blalock. "Reach NM allows us connect at a one-on-one level to offer support and resources in a way that is natural to our kids."

Youth who send text messages to Reach NM are connected directly with an advocate who asks some initial assessment questions including what is going on and how the youth is feeling at the moment they reach out to the department.

The worker then connects the child with appropriate resources in their community.

If suspected abuse or neglect is disclosed, the text engagement worker will complete an official Statewide Central Intake report so investigators can respond appropriately based on the severity of the situation the same if a notification as received through the department's #SAFE/855-333-SAFE telephone numbers.

"A member of my senior staff received a text message from a young person who was in distress in the middle of the night," said Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham. "My staff was able to connect that child to the help they needed, and that led to the idea of a text-based reporting and support system available to young people at any time, day or night. This is an important tool to help empower our young people to help themselves and their families. Not only are youth more comfortable disclosing abuse and neglect via a text message than a phone call or face-to-face meeting, similar programs have reported youth also feel better about themselves when they can ask for help."

CYFD worked with vendor iCarol to stand the Reach NM texting system which allows people to send a Short Message Service (SMS) or text message.

Engagement experts can also use the system to connect those in need with the wide range of support and services available, such as food banks or assistance with transportation to and from medical appointment.

While people who report through Reach NM can remain anonymous, workers can track calls from the same person over time, potentially uncovering other ways the Department might assist them or their family.

“If you are a youth who needs any kind of help, we can connect you to resources that work for you,” Secretary Blalock said. ‘We want to authentically engage kids where they are and say to that young person ‘You were able to help yourself or your family by standing up and asking for help.’ It’s not easy to ask for help, so by providing comfortable ways to ask for assistance we can, over time, help destigmatize the use of important community supports like food banks and behavioral health.”

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CYFD does not discriminate against any child or youth involved with any aspect the system on the basis of race; creed, religion; sex or gender; gender identity; gender expression; sexual orientation; marital status or partnership; familial or parental status; pregnancy and breastfeeding or nursing; disability; genetic information; intersex traits; citizenship or immigration status; national origin; tribal affiliation; ancestry; language; political affiliation; military or veteran status; medical condition, including HIV/AIDS; status as a survivor of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking; and housing status, including homelessness; or any other non-merit factor.

If you believe that you have been discriminated against with respect to a CYFD program or activity, you may contact the Office of the Secretary.

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