

ALERT DATE: March 23, 2020

This e-mail is being sent to professionals who are interested in receiving benefits updates regarding older adults and people with disabilities.

Hello! It looks like the Family Community Resource Centers (FCRCs), also known as the local Department of Human Services (DHS) offices, remain open. As I reported to you last week, they are working with less staff. The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) released information on March 21, 2020 regarding their operations, "An Important Message for IDHS Customers and their Families": <http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=123396> . The notice indicates the following:

- IDHS has temporarily closed 45 local Division of Rehabilitation (DRS) Offices (Vocational Rehab and Home Services Program)
- Scaled down staffing levels at 75 Family Community Resource Centers (FCRCs)
- Urging consumers to use ABE.illinois.gov or call 1-800-843-6154 to obtain or renew benefits managed by IDHS
- Staff who are working remotely are processing benefits

Last Friday, I was asked if the South Suburban DHS Office was open as one of the agencies could not get through to anyone and was not receiving responses from any of her contacts. According to a memorandum dated 3/19/20, all FCRCs were open. On 3/17/20, a memo was released indicating that the South Suburban DHS office would be closing that day for an indefinite period of time. A memo concerning the South Suburban DHS Office reopening was not issued. Confusing... I went down the DHS Roster and called key staff members. No luck.

I decided to go to the South Suburban DHS office to see if it was open. I rationalized that it would save me time in the long run. To my surprise, it was open. There were notices taped to the locked revolving door stating that that you should not enter the building if you are experiencing any symptoms. When I entered the building, I was stopped immediately and questioned why I was at the office. People who are usually very friendly with me were not very happy to see me. The security team and DHS staffers were all wearing masks. The feeling of fear in the workers was insurmountable. I was informed that they reopened the office on 3/18/20 and it would be decided on a daily basis if they would be open or not.

I would suggest not directing any consumer to the local DHS Office. It's not safe for the consumer or the DHS staff due to the spread of COVID-19. Also, it probably wouldn't be the best customer service experience for the consumer. Do what you are able to reach the Local Office Administrator/Assistant Local Office Administrators. Create a subject line in your e-mail that will grab them or touch their hearts. Suggest the consumer phone the Call Center at 1-800-843-6154. I have a feeling they have some time on their hands. I understand that you are working with consumers who are very worried about their health/benefits and you want to do what you can to help them. Please know that you are helping them and doing the best you can in a world that is very different than it was a few weeks ago. I always remember the

compassionate words of one of the previous LOAs, "Everyone's application is important" when thinking about the strugglesw of getting benefits for clients.

I am working on trying to find out if the redetermination deadlines for benefits will be extended. As soon as I get the information, I will send it out to you.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth