

## Chapter DCF 39

## RELINQUISHING CUSTODY OF A NEWBORN CHILD

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**Note:** Chapter HFS 39 was renumbered chapter DCF 39 under s. 13.92 (4) (b) 1., Stats., Register November 2008 No. 635.

**DCF 39.01 Authority and purpose.** This chapter is promulgated under the authority of ss. 48.195 (6) and 227.11 (2), Stats., to establish procedures under which a parent may relinquish a newborn who is 72 hours old or younger and procedures by which a law enforcement officer, emergency medical technician, or hospital staff member may take custody of a relinquished newborn, and procedures by which a parent who relinquishes a newborn may choose to be identified as the newborn's parent.

**History:** CR 03–010: cr. Register January 2004 No. 577, eff. 2–1–04.

**DCF 39.02 Initial applicability.** This rule applies to newborns relinquished on or after the effective date of this rule.

**History:** CR 03–010: cr. Register January 2004 No. 577, eff. 2–1–04.

**DCF 39.03 Definitions.** In this chapter:

(1) "Agent" means any person providing services under a contract with an emergency medical service provider.

(2) "Ambulance service provider" means a person licensed to engage in the business of transporting sick, disabled or injured individuals by ambulance to or from facilities or institutions providing health services.

(4) "Child" has the meaning given in s. 48.02 (2), Stats.

(5) "Coerce" means to force to act or think in a given manner or to compel by pressure or threat.

(6) "County department" means an agency under s. 46.22 or 46.23, Stats.

(7) "Custody" means having the physical person of a newborn in the absence of a court order granting physical or legal custody to a physical custodian.

(8) "Department" means the Wisconsin department of children and families.

(9) "Emergency medical service provider" means any one of the following:

- (a) A hospital.
- (b) A law enforcement agency.
- (c) A fire department.
- (d) An ambulance service provider.
- (e) A public agency.
- (f) A public safety agency.

(10) "Emergency medical technician" means an individual who is licensed as any one of the following:

- (a) An EMT–basic.
- (b) An EMT–basic IV.
- (c) An EMT–intermediate.
- (d) An EMT–paramedic.

(11) "Fire department" has the meaning given in s. SPS 314.03 (1) (d).

(12) "Hospital" has the meaning given in s. 50.33 (2) (a) and (c), Stats., except for psychiatric hospitals or mental hospitals, approved to operate according to the provisions of s. DHS 124.03.

(13) "Hospital–provided emergency medical services" means services provided by a hospital that the department has identified as providing some category of emergency service.

(14) "Hospital staff member" means any of the following individuals employed by or under contract with a hospital:

(a) An emergency medical technician working in the hospital under the direction of a physician.

(b) A hospital social worker, case worker, or social work assistant.

(c) A licensed practical nurse licensed under s. 441.10, Stats.

(d) A physician, as defined in s. 448.01 (5), Stats.

(e) A physician assistant, as defined in s. 448.971 (2), Stats.

(f) A registered nurse licensed under s. 441.06, Stats.

(g) Any other employee or agent who is designated in a written hospital policy to take custody of a newborn under this chapter.

(h) An employee or agent who is designated in a written hospital policy to dispatch a law enforcement officer or emergency medical technician to meet a parent who wishes to relinquish a newborn.

(15) "Identifying information" means any information that would disclose the name, location, or identity of a parent or a person assisting a parent.

(16) "Induce" means to lead or move a parent relinquishing a newborn or a person assisting a parent relinquishing a newborn by influence or persuasion.

(17) "Intake worker" means any person who meets the requirements of s. 48.06 (1) (am) and (2) (b), Stats., and who provides intake services under ch. 48, Stats.

(18) "Law enforcement agency" has the meaning given in s. 165.83 (1) (b), Stats.

(19) "Law enforcement officer" has the meaning given in s. 165.85 (2) (c), Stats.

(20) "Maternal and child health hotline" means the 24–hour per day, 7–day per week information and referral toll–free telephone service administered by the department.

(21) "Newborn" means a person whom a law enforcement officer, emergency medical technician, or a hospital staff member reasonably believes to be 72 hours old or younger.

(22) "Parent" means one of the following:

(a) A biological mother or a biological father of a newborn.

(b) A male who is presumed to be the father of a newborn under s. 891.41, Stats.

(23) "Public agency" has the meaning given in s. 256.35 (1) (f), Stats.

(24) "Public safety agency" has the meaning given in s. 256.35 (1) (g), Stats.

(25) "Relinquish" means to voluntarily give the physical person of a newborn to a law enforcement officer, emergency medical technician, or hospital staff member.

**History:** CR 03–010: cr. Register January 2004 No. 577, eff. 2–1–04; corrections in (8), (11), (12), (14) (b), (23), and (24) made under s. 13.92 (4) (b) 6. and 7., Stats., Register November 2008 No. 635; correction in (11) made under s. 13.92 (4) (b) 7.,

Stats., Register December 2010 No. 660; correction in (11) made under s. 13.92 (4) (b) 7., Stats., Register February 2012 No. 674; correction in (14) (c) made under s. 13.92 (4) (b) 7., Stats., Register October 2015 No. 718; CR 21–107: r. (3), am. (14) (b) Register June 2022 No. 798, eff. 7–1–22; **correction in (14) (e) made under s. 13.92 (4) (b) 7., Stats., Register January 2023 No. 805.**

**DCF 39.04 Relinquishing custody of a newborn.**

**(1) INDIVIDUALS WHO MAY RELINQUISH A NEWBORN.** A newborn may only be relinquished under this chapter by a parent of the newborn.

**(2) PARTICIPATION OF OTHERS DURING RELINQUISHMENT.** A parent may select any person to assist the parent in the relinquishment of a newborn.

**History:** CR 03–010: cr. Register January 2004 No. 577, eff. 2–1–04.

**DCF 39.05 Taking a newborn into custody. (1) WHO MAY TAKE CUSTODY OF A NEWBORN.** The following individuals may take custody of a newborn relinquished under this chapter:

- (a) An emergency medical technician.
- (b) A hospital staff member specified in s. DCF 39.03 (14) (a) to (g).
- (c) A law enforcement officer.

**(2) INDIVIDUALS REQUIRED TO TAKE CUSTODY OF A NEWBORN.** If a law enforcement officer or emergency medical technician is requested to meet a parent who wishes to relinquish a newborn, the law enforcement officer or emergency medical technician shall meet the parent and take custody of the newborn in the manner specified in s. DCF 39.09.

**(3) LIMITATIONS ON TAKING CUSTODY.** The individuals specified in subs. (1) and (2) shall be actively employed by, or under contract with, an emergency medical service provider, and acting within the scope of the contract or employment during the act of relinquishment and until custody of the newborn is transferred to an intake worker as required in s. DCF 39.09 (3).

**(4) COMPLETION OF RESPONSIBILITIES UPON TAKING CUSTODY.** If a person who takes custody of a newborn under this chapter cannot subsequently fulfil the requirements of s. DCF 39.09, the requirements of s. DCF 39.09 shall be fulfilled by any other person described in sub. (1).

**History:** CR 03–010: cr. Register January 2004 No. 577, eff. 2–1–04; corrections in (1) (b) and (2) to (4) made under s. 13.92 (4) (b) 7., Stats., Register November 2008 No. 635.

**DCF 39.06 Court authority upon relinquishment.**

Upon completion of the act of relinquishment, the court has exclusive original jurisdiction of a relinquished newborn as specified under s. 48.13 (2m), Stats. Custody of a relinquished newborn may not be returned to a parent or transferred to any other person, except as provided in ss. DCF 39.09 (3) and 39.05 (1), and s. 48.207, Stats., or by court order pursuant to ch. 48, Stats.

**History:** CR 03–010: cr. Register January 2004 No. 577, eff. 2–1–04; correction made under s. 13.92 (4) (b) 7., Stats., Register November 2008 No. 635.

**DCF 39.07 Health and safety of a newborn upon relinquishment. (1)** A law enforcement officer, emergency medical technician, or hospital staff member who takes a newborn into custody under this chapter shall take any action necessary to protect the health and safety of the newborn, including obtaining hospital–provided emergency medical services for each newborn taken into custody under this chapter.

**(2)** If the location of a relinquishment is not a hospital, an ambulance service provider shall transport the newborn to the nearest hospital.

**(3)** A hospital receiving a newborn under this chapter shall provide care for the newborn as provided in this chapter, ch. DHS 124, and s. 256.30, Stats.

**(4)** Within 5 days after taking or receiving custody of a newborn, a hospital staff member shall file a birth certificate for the newborn under s. 69.14 (3), Stats.

**(5)** The act of relinquishment shall be presumed to be parental consent for the purpose of providing medical treatment and care

to a relinquished newborn until an appropriate court order is granted under s. 48.373 (1), Stats.

**History:** CR 03–010: cr. Register January 2004 No. 577, eff. 2–1–04; correction in (3) made under s. 13.92 (4) (b) 7., Stats., Register November 2008 No. 635.

**DCF 39.08 Anonymity and confidentiality. (1)** A parent who relinquishes custody of a newborn, or a person assisting a parent in that relinquishment, may do so anonymously.

**(2)** A parent who relinquishes custody of a newborn or a person assisting the parent with the relinquishment, who chooses to relinquish a newborn anonymously under sub. (1) may refuse to provide identifying information to, and may, at any time, leave the presence of, the law enforcement officer, emergency medical technician, or hospital staff member who took custody of the newborn, unless the law enforcement officer, emergency medical technician, or hospital staff member reasonably believes that one of the following circumstances exists:

(a) The newborn has been abused or neglected, as defined in s. 48.02 (1) and (12g), Stats.

(b) The parent is being coerced or induced into relinquishing the newborn.

**(3)** No person, including an officer, employee, or agent of this state or a political subdivision of this state, may induce or coerce or attempt to induce or coerce a parent or a person assisting a parent in relinquishing a newborn under this chapter to provide identifying information or attempt to ascertain identifying information from, or follow, or pursue, or locate a parent who relinquishes a newborn under this chapter or a person that assisted a parent in relinquishing a newborn, unless the person reasonably believes that the circumstances in sub. (2) (a) or (b) exist.

**(4)** Any person who has or obtains information relating to the relinquishment of a newborn shall keep that information confidential and may not disclose that information, except to the persons specified in s. 48.195 (2) (d), Stats.

**(5) (a)** A parent who chooses to be identified during the act of relinquishment may be asked all of the information specified in s. DCF 39.09 (1), and any other information deemed pertinent by the person taking custody of the newborn.

(b) A parent who anonymously relinquishes a newborn under sub. (1) may choose to be identified as a parent of the newborn subsequent to the relinquishment by following the procedures specified in s. DCF 39.11.

**(6)** Nothing in this chapter shall affect the manner in which a law enforcement officer, emergency medical technician, or hospital staff member performs the duties prescribed by law or under licensure or certification.

**History:** CR 03–010: cr. Register January 2004 No. 577, eff. 2–1–04; corrections in (5) made under s. 13.92 (4) (b) 7., Stats., Register November 2008 No. 635; correction in (2) (a) made under s. 13.92 (4) (b) 7., Stats., Register May 2010 No. 653; CR 21–107: am. (6) Register June 2022 No. 798, eff. 7–1–22.

**DCF 39.09 Responsibilities of a person taking custody of a newborn.** In addition to protecting the health and safety of the newborn as required under s. DCF 39.07, a person taking custody of a newborn under this chapter shall do all of the following:

**(1)** Inform the parent, and any person assisting the parent with the relinquishment, of the anonymity provisions in s. DCF 39.08. If the parent chooses under s. DCF 39.08 (5) to provide identifying information or be identified as a parent of the newborn, make a reasonable effort to obtain all of the following:

(a) Information regarding the social and health history of each parent of the newborn, and of the families of each parent as prescribed by the department.

(b) Information on the ethnicity and race of the newborn, including whether the newborn is of American Indian heritage and, if so, any tribal affiliation.

(c) The name, address, telephone number, and any other identifying information of each parent, and any person assisting a parent in the relinquishment.

(2) Offer the parent who relinquishes a newborn and any person present with a parent during the relinquishment the publication entitled *Relinquishment Brochure and Questionnaire* created by the department. If the parent or a person present with the parent refuses the information offered, document the refusal as prescribed in sub. (6).

**Note:** The documents comprising the *Relinquishment Brochure and Questionnaire* are available in the "forms and publications" section of the department website, [dcf.wisconsin.gov](http://dcf.wisconsin.gov), as "publication number 4073".

(3) (a) Within 24 hours after taking custody of the newborn, transfer custody of the newborn to the intake worker in the county where the relinquishment occurred and provide, as requested by the intake worker, all of the information relating to the relinquishment obtained before, during and after the act of relinquishment.

(b) Upon accepting custody of a relinquished newborn, the intake worker shall immediately request that the appropriate law enforcement agency investigate and determine, through the Wisconsin missing children information clearinghouse, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and any other national and state resource, whether the newborn has been reported as a missing child. The intake worker shall document the request and results of the search in the usual and customary manner of performing intake services under ch. 48, Stats.

(4) Take custody of the newborn or child and immediately notify, as appropriate, a law enforcement agency or officer, if any of the following circumstances are believed to exist:

(a) The person attempting to relinquish the newborn or child is not the parent of the newborn or child.

(b) The child is more than 72 hours old.

(c) The newborn or child has been abused or neglected, as defined in s. 48.02 (1) and (12g), Stats.

(d) The parent who is relinquishing the newborn is being induced or coerced, or has been induced or coerced, into relinquishing the newborn.

(5) If required under s. 48.981 (3), Stats., a law enforcement officer notified under sub. (4) shall make a referral to a county department or the department in a county having a population of 750,000 or more.

(6) Document all of the non-identifying information observed or obtained during the relinquishment, including the information obtained from performing the responsibilities in subs. (1) to (5) and in s. DCF 39.07.

**History:** CR 03-010: cr. Register January 2004 No. 577, eff. 2-1-04; corrections in (intro.), (1) (intro.) and (6) made under s. 13.92 (4) (b) 7., Stats., Register November 2008 No. 635; correction in (4) (c) made under s. 13.92 (4) (b) 7., Stats., Register May 2010 No. 653; CR 21-107: r. and recr. (5) Register June 2022 No. 798, eff. 7-1-22.

**DCF 39.10 Responsibilities of emergency medical service providers.** An emergency medical service provider whose employee or agent takes custody of a newborn or who may be required to dispatch a law enforcement officer or emergency medical technician under this chapter shall do all of the following:

(1) Develop and implement written policies and procedures that set forth how the emergency medical service provider will cooperate with other emergency medical service providers to perform its responsibilities under this chapter.

(2) Develop and implement written policies and procedures to guide employees and agents in their activities performed under this chapter.

(3) Ensure that an employee or agent who takes custody of a newborn under this chapter is trained in the policies and procedures developed pursuant to subs. (1) and (2).

(4) Maintain a supply of the publication entitled *Relinquishment Brochure and Questionnaire* to be distributed by an employee or agent pursuant to s. DCF 39.09 (2).

**Note:** The documents comprising the *Relinquishment Brochure and Questionnaire* are available in the "forms and publications" section of the department website, [dcf.wisconsin.gov](http://dcf.wisconsin.gov), as "publication number 4073".

(5) Maintain all of the following written documentation:

(a) Name and title of the employee or agent who took custody of the newborn and the name and title of any other employee or agent present during the act of relinquishment.

(b) Date and time of the relinquishment, and address where the relinquishment occurred. If the actual address cannot be ascertained, the nearest cross street to the location where the relinquishment occurred.

(c) Any relevant information relating to the relinquishment given to an employee or agent.

(d) Information on the general health of the newborn at the time of the relinquishment and during the transfer of custody of the newborn to an intake worker under s. DCF 39.09 (3).

(e) Any non-identifying observations concerning the relinquishment made by an employee or agent who took custody of a newborn and any employee or agent who was present during the relinquishment or was otherwise involved in the relinquishment.

(f) A description of all actions taken by an employee or agent after the newborn was taken into custody, including all locations that a newborn was taken and the reason the newborn was taken to any of the specified locations.

(g) The age or estimated age of the newborn.

(h) The name and address of the intake worker, and the date, time, and location that custody was transferred to the intake worker under s. DCF 39.09 (3).

(i) Whether the newborn is believed to have been abused or neglected, as defined in s. 48.02 (1) and (12g), Stats.

(j) The date on which a birth certificate for the newborn was filed as specified in s. DCF 39.07 (4).

(k) Whether the parent or person assisting with the parent during the relinquishment refused to accept any information offered.

(l) Whether the parent or person assisting the parent voluntarily provided any identifying information.

(m) Whether the employee or agent that took custody of the newborn informed the parent and the person assisting the parent during the relinquishment, of the anonymity and confidentiality provisions specified in s. DCF 39.08.

(n) Procedures that prescribe the transfer of responsibilities under s. DCF 39.05 (4) from an employee or agent who took custody of a newborn to a different employee or agent authorized under s. DCF 39.05 (1) or (2) to take custody of a newborn.

(6) Make available in a location conspicuous to an employee and agent a copy of this chapter and the policies and procedures developed and implemented under subs. (1) and (2).

(7) Develop and implement any other written policies and procedures that may be required by the department under this chapter.

**History:** CR 03-010: cr. Register January 2004 No. 577, eff. 2-1-04; corrections in (4), (5) (d), (h), (j), (m) and (n) made under s. 13.92 (4) (b) 7., Stats., Register November 2008 No. 635; correction in (5) (i) made under s. 13.92 (4) (b) 7., Stats., Register May 2010 No. 653.

**DCF 39.11 Procedures for being identified as a parent of a newborn.** (1) If a parent who relinquished a newborn anonymously under s. DCF 39.08 (1) later wishes to be identified as a parent of the newborn, or the other parent of the newborn wishes to be identified as a parent of the newborn, the parent shall contact the intake worker in the county in which the relinquishment occurred.

(2) An intake worker contacted by a parent under sub. (1) shall advise the parent of the procedures to be followed by the intake worker under ch. 48, Stats., concerning a newborn alleged to be in need of protection or services under s. 48.13 (2m), Stats.

(3) An intake worker contacted by a parent under this section, shall make a reasonable effort to obtain from the parent any identifying information about the parent, the other parent of the new-

born, and any other information necessary for the performance of the intake worker's responsibilities under ch. 48, Stats.

**History:** CR 03–010: cr. Register January 2004 No. 577, eff. 2–1–04; correction in (1) made under s. 13.92 (4) (b) 7., Stats., Register November 2008 No. 635.

**DCF 39.12 Immunity from liability.** Any parent who relinquishes custody of a newborn under this chapter and any person who assists a parent in that relinquishment, and any law enforcement officer, emergency medical technician, or hospital

staff member who takes a newborn into custody under this chapter has the immunity and limitations on immunity as specified in s. 48.195 (4), Stats.

**History:** CR 03–010: cr. Register January 2004 No. 577, eff. 2–1–04.

**DCF 39.13 Medical assistance eligibility.** A newborn who is taken into custody under this chapter is presumed to be eligible for medical assistance as specified in s. 48.195 (5), Stats.

**History:** CR 03–010: cr. Register January 2004 No. 577, eff. 2–1–04.