



# **Safe Haven Law Annual Report January 2021**

**Pursuant to  
HCR 107 - Louisiana 2016 Regular Session  
and  
Children's Code Article 1160**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As required by Louisiana Children's Code, Article 1160, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is submitting this report to both the House and Senate Committees on Health and Welfare regarding the Safe Haven Law.

A series of high-profile infant abandonment cases across the country prompted the Louisiana Legislature to combat the problem. In 2000, Louisiana enacted the Safe Haven Law, amending the Children's Code Articles 1101 and 1193 and Title XVII of the Children's Code, Articles 1701-1706, to provide for the Safe Haven relinquishment of newborns. That Code was again amended in 2003 and most recently in 2018. The entire Safe Haven Law, contained in LA Children's Code Chapter 13, Articles 1149-1160, provides a safe, legal, last resort alternative to abandonment.

Through House Concurrent Resolution 107 of the 2016 Legislative Session, a Safe Haven Consortium formed of a select group of representative of emergency care facilities and key stakeholder groups to assist DCFS in developing and maintaining a registry of Safe Haven sites and to promote best practice related to the Safe Haven Law. DCFS assists in organizing and facilitating the Consortium meetings. Included in Section 6.0 of this report is a summary of the Consortium's activities and recommendations as HCR 107 required.

## 2.0 OVERVIEW OF DATA AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (then the Department of Social Services) implemented policies and procedures in 2004 relating to the state's Safe Haven Law. These policies and procedures have been updated by the agency each time the law was amended. Since 2004, 79 infants were safely relinquished through the Safe Haven Law at the point of initial contact with the State. The chart below provides details on the 79 successful relinquishments. As you can see in the chart below, there has been an increase the last two years in relinquishments. This could possibly be due to the enhanced efforts on public awareness of the Safe Haven Law. In addition, there have not been any infant abandonments since February 2019, when a parent left an infant on the grounds of a hospital, but not in the hands of an employee.

Number of Safe Haven Cases CY 2004 – 2020																		
Region	Calendar Year																	Total
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Orleans	0	2	0	1	1	1	3	0	2	5	0	1	4	2	2	1	1	<b>26</b>
Baton Rouge	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	2	1	2	1	1	1	<b>13</b>
Covington	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	<b>10</b>
Thibodaux	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Lafayette	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	<b>12</b>
Lake Charles	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	<b>5</b>
Alexandria	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	<b>4</b>
Shreveport	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	2	<b>7</b>
Monroe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>79</b>

Safe Haven Cases from 2013-2020 by Receiving Emergency Designated Facility Type									
Region	Calendar Year								
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Licensed Hospitals upon birth of child	7	2	3	4	5	3	7	9	40
Other Licensed Hospitals	3	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	7
Fire Stations	1	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	5
Emergency Medical Service Providers (911)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Child Advocacy Centers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medical Clinics	0	0	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	0
Public Health Units	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Law Enforcement Stations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Crisis Pregnancy Centers	0	0	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	0
Licensed Rural Health Clinics	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0	0
Licensed Ambulatory Surgical Centers	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0	0
Federally Qualified Health Units	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>53</b>
*Please note that Crisis Pregnancy Centers are no longer Safe Haven Sites and Licensed Rural Health Clinics, Licensed Ambulatory Surgical Centers, and Federally Qualified Health Units have been added.									

### 3.0 PROGRAMMATIC UPDATES

Through the joint efforts of the Safe Haven Consortium and DCFS, strides have been made in promoting best practice related to the Safe Haven Law. In October 2017, the Safe Haven Registry, an online tool to locate Safe Haven sites, was published on the DCFS website. At that time, the law defined a designated emergency care facility as any medical clinic, any hospital licensed in Louisiana, any fire station, any police station, any public health unit, any emergency medical service provider, any crisis pregnancy center, or any child advocacy center. The creation of the registry shed light on the need for clarity in the legal definitions of “designated emergency care facilities.” As a result of the work of the Safe Haven Consortium, DCFS proposed legislative changes to further define Safe Haven sites. These recommendations resulted in the passage of Act 134 in 2018, modifying Safe Haven Laws to reflect these changes. Crisis Pregnancy Centers were removed as a Safe Haven site, and the following were added/modified as approved Safe Haven sites:

- Any hospital licensed in the State of Louisiana;
- The following medical clinics during normal and customary hours of operation: local or parish public health units, licensed rural health clinics, licensed ambulatory surgical centers, and Federally Qualified Health Centers;
- Any manned fire station;
- Any manned law enforcement station; and
- Any Child Advocacy Center accredited by the National Children’s Alliance, during normal and customary hours of operation.

In addition, “Emergency Medical Service Provider” was defined to include any licensed emergency medical service provider, when dispatched as a result of a “911” call, from a parent who wishes to relinquish his infant under the Safe Haven Law. The provisions set forth in the LA Children’s Code Article 1152, which apply to Designated Emergency Care Facilities, also apply to Emergency Medical Service Providers.

Due to the passage of Act 134, updates were made to the DCFS website, Safe Haven Registry, and Safe Haven materials.

During the 2019 legislative session, a bill was proposed by Representative Pylant to implement “Safe Haven Baby Boxes” in Louisiana. In general, baby boxes are devices that are installed in the wall of a Safe Haven site that allow a parent to relinquish an infant anonymously without face-to-face contact with a person. There is one primary manufacturer and distributor of the baby box, with other alternatives available. The proposed legislation did not pass. A similar bill was proposed by Representative Huval in 2020 legislative session, but did not move forward due to COVID-19 limitations. The Safe Haven Consortium researched, evaluated, and is making a recommendation regarding the Baby Boxes again this year. This recommendation can be found in the Safe Haven Consortium section in the report.

In September 2020, DCFS partnered with the National Safe Haven Alliance(NSHA) to offer a 24/7 Hotline staffed by highly trained crisis response experts using a holistic approach to help parents who are considering relinquishing their baby under the Louisiana’s Safe Haven Law. The NSHA crisis response team uses a three-tiered approach to walk callers through their options-including parenting, adoption, and relinquishment-and establish a plan to fit their needs. New parents may believe they are unable to parent their baby due to extenuating circumstances. NSHA’s experts can help navigate callers through those challenges and prepare for parenthood, or if desired, connect them to an adoption agency within the state. If neither parenting nor adoption is an option, the team can help the parent prepare for a safe and legal relinquishment of the baby to an authorized Safe Haven site employee or 911 dispatched responders.

## **4.0 SAFE HAVEN PUBLIC AWARENESS**

### **ACTIVITIES TO DATE**

In February 2009, DCFS launched a statewide public awareness campaign for Louisiana’s Safe Haven Law. The campaign featured billboards, brochures, public service announcements for radio and television, and the creation of a website ([www.louisianasafehaven.com](http://www.louisianasafehaven.com)). The Department also designed posters, business cards, and window decals for Safe Haven facilities. In July 2009, an online form was created for Safe Haven facilities to request materials for their Safe Haven site.

Since 2009, DCFS has appeared in radio, television, and newspaper reports bringing awareness to Louisiana's Safe Haven Law as an alternative to abandonment. The Department also periodically issued news releases about relinquishments and updates to the Safe Haven Law. The issue has been the focus of intense media coverage in instances of infant abandonments, some resulting in tragedy or near-tragedy. The Department has responded through proactive media outreach and response, as well as postings to the department's Facebook and Twitter accounts ([www.twitter.com/LouisianaDCFS](https://www.twitter.com/LouisianaDCFS) and [www.facebook.com/LADCFS](https://www.facebook.com/LADCFS)), all in an effort to inform the public about the safe, legal alternative to infant abandonment.

In 2013, when the relinquishment age was changed to 60 days old, redesigned brochures and posters were printed. Updated packets of posters, brochures, cards and decals were then mailed to Louisiana Safe Haven facilities.

In 2017 there was an increase in the requests from Safe Haven sites for publications on Safe Haven. In 2017, DCFS distributed at least 88 packets of information, as compared to 42 in 2016. The packets are individualized, but contain such information as posters, decals, brochures and cards.

In May 2017, DCFS updated its Safe Haven brochure to reflect changes in the law.

In October 2017, the department launched an online mapping tool designed to help the public locate hospitals, fire stations and other facilities where they can legally relinquish a newborn through the Safe Haven Law. Both the Safe Haven "locator" and the updated brochure were funded through a grant by the Children's Trust Fund. In addition, DCFS updated its online training video for Safe Haven providers.

DCFS made the launch of the mapping tool the focus of a public awareness campaign in October 2017 and of media outreach in 2018, as the Communications Office used news of child abandonments as opportunities to share information about the Safe Haven Law.

In addition to conducting interviews and providing Safe Haven information to the media, DCFS updated and reprinted Safe Haven materials in 2018. The Communications Office revised and ordered new Safe Haven brochures, information cards and posters in October 2018. It updated the Safe Haven listings in the mapping tool. As part of a department-wide website redesign project, it enhanced its online Safe Haven resources, including information about the Safe Haven Law.

In 2019, the Communications Office ran a social media campaign on Safe Haven, highlighting the online Safe Haven facility locator, the requirement that a baby be relinquished into the hands of a Safe Haven employee, and the fact that relinquishments are confidential, allowing the parent to remain anonymous.

In 2020, the department promoted the state's partnership with the National Safe Haven Alliance 24-hour Crisis Hotline in the fall with a press release, media outreach and a social media campaign, but its crowning achievement was the production of a brief animated video, explaining

the Safe Haven law and the options presented to mothers when they contact the National Safe Haven Alliance Hotline and visit LouisianaSafeHaven.com on the DCFS website.

## **5.0 COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

### **Objective**

The Department of Children and Family Services intends to make the video the centerpiece of its 2021 promotional efforts through a multi-media communication campaign in the spring.

### **Target Audiences**

- Louisiana Safe Haven Consortium members – This diverse group includes DCFS partners who share the department’s commitment to reduce infant abandonment and increase the awareness of options.
- General Public – This includes anyone who might benefit from knowledge of the Safe Haven law and ways to access it, among them are DCFS clients – individuals receiving a variety of services from the agency.
- Key Mandated Reporters – This includes teachers, health care workers, counselors and others who deal with potential Safe Haven Program beneficiaries.
- Policy Makers and Stakeholders – DCFS stakeholders include the Administration, state Legislature, state partner agencies and nonprofit organizations that would benefit from Safe Haven information.
- Safe Haven Relinquishment Sites – This includes licensed hospitals, local or parish public health units, licensed rural health units, licensed rural health clinics, licensed ambulatory surgical centers, Federally Qualified Health Centers, emergency medical service providers, fire stations, law enforcement stations, and child advocacy centers accredited by the National Children’s Alliance.

### **Strategies**

#### **Promotional Strategies would include but not be limited to the following:**

- Updating and enhancing the DCFS website to support all communications
- Promoting co-branding or re-branding of the video by partners to increase the likelihood of its adoption, use and promotion
- Using social media and traditional media to increase awareness
- Purchasing social media advertising
- Presenting the video to legislators and other opinion leaders
- Highlighting the video through targeted industry (i.e. nursing, education) presentations

### **Monitoring Outcomes**

- DCFS will use social media and website analytics to track the effectiveness of communication efforts and gauge engagement.
- The department will monitor media coverage of Safe Haven press releases and related promotions to ensure accuracy of reporting and determine public engagement resulting from the efforts.
- Requests for printed materials will be monitored and tracked for future print orders. Inquiries from legislators and other stakeholders in regards to the Safe Haven Law will also be tracked.

## **6.0 REPORT FROM THE SAFE HAVEN CONSORTIUM**

The Safe Haven Consortium is comprised of representatives from the Louisiana Department of Health; Louisiana Hospital Association; Louisiana Emergency Response Network; Louisiana Ambulance Alliance; Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners; Louisiana State Board of Nursing; Professional Fire Fighters Association of Louisiana; Louisiana Fire Chiefs Association; Louisiana Sheriffs' Association; Louisiana Association of Chiefs of Police; Louisiana Peace Officers Association; Louisiana State Troopers Association; Magnolia State Peace Officers Association of Louisiana; Children's Advocacy Centers of Louisiana; National Association of Social Workers, Louisiana Chapter; Louisiana School Boards Association; Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools; Louisiana Association of Educators; Louisiana Federation of Teachers; and Louisiana Association of Student Councils. Participation in Consortium meetings has not occurred by many of the agencies listed.

Additional Stakeholder groups that participate in the Consortium meetings include the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services, the Louisiana Department of Education, Louisiana CASA, Louisiana Right to Life, and Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families.

The Consortium's chairperson is Caroline Roemer, with the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools; and the vice chairperson is Paige Hargrove, with the Louisiana Emergency Response Network.

Three Consortium meetings were held in 2020 with the focus being on implementation of a 24-hour hotline through the National Safe Haven Alliance, increasing public awareness, and continuous evaluation of implementing Safe Haven Baby Boxes in Louisiana. The National Safe Haven Alliance participated in two of the three Consortium meetings, providing assistance with best practice, strengthening the law, increasing public awareness in regards to Safe Haven. In regards to the Safe Haven Baby Boxes, the Consortium promotes a safe handoff of the infant to an individual as it allows for the child and relinquishing parent's safety, health, and well-being to be immediately addressed. Should legislation be proposed and passed in favor of Safe Haven Baby Boxes, the Consortium recommends that the installation be voluntary and limited to only licensed acute care hospitals in the State of Louisiana to allow oversight of the boxes and immediate medical attention for the child. In addition, educational pamphlets should be displayed along with the phone number that the parent can anonymously contact to provide a



health history, any other information beneficial for the care of the infant or to find out how to regain custody of their infant.

## **7.0 SAFE HAVEN BABY BOXES**

House Bills were introduced in the 2019 and 2020 legislative sessions that proposed the voluntary use of Safe Haven Baby Boxes in designated Safe Haven sites that provide medical services. DCFS had concerns with these bills. In line with the Consortium and the primary mission of DCFS in keeping children safe, while treating all with dignity, compassion, and respect, the concern regarding a child and relinquishing parent's safety, health, and well-being takes precedence. Louisiana has made great strides in implementing best practice with Safe Haven relinquishments, ultimately resulting in changes in the law, increased public awareness efforts, revisions in training for Safe Haven providers, and modification of signage and brochures intended to educate and spread awareness of the Safe Haven relinquishment option.

Relinquishing a newborn to another person reduces safety risks to a child, ensuring that any immediate medical needs are met, that the child has not been abused and/or neglected, while also preventing possible trauma associated with being placed in a device/box. The National Safe Haven Alliance (NSHA) agrees that in-person relinquishments are the standard for Safe Haven relinquishments. The implementation of Safe Haven Baby Boxes/devices does not guarantee that newborn abandonments will not occur, as in October 2019 a newborn was found abandoned, yet alive, within one mile of an installed baby box in Indiana.

Respect, dignity, and compassion should also be considered for the relinquishing parent. The NSHA encourages a parent to relinquish to a person, ultimately ensuring the immediate medical care and safety of the newborn while allowing support/medical for the mother/parent if needed. By promoting the surrender of a newborn with a person, there is often the opportunity to discuss other options that may allow a holistic approach to enable parenting, temporary placement, or adoption planning. Surrendering to a trained professional ensures the relinquishing parent is giving informed consent for her child to be adopted. Although the use of Safe Haven devices/boxes provides an opportunity for anonymity of the relinquishing parent, Louisiana has current laws regarding confidentiality of the relinquishing parent. In addition, it is unknown as to whether or not relinquishments that occurred through baby boxes in other states occurred without any contact with an employee at the site.

DCFS is also in agreement with NSHA that it would be more beneficial to have widespread education on the Safe Haven Law instead of implementing one Baby Box in one community due to the extensive cost of the device. At least three other states did not pass proposed legislation for Safe Haven Baby Boxes for similar reasons cited here, including Florida, Illinois, and Michigan.

## **8.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

DCFS and the Safe Haven Consortium are proud of the efforts made in promoting and enhancing practice around Safe Haven relinquishments. Through this work, a 24-hour support line manned by the National Safe Haven Alliance has been implemented. Within the last two

years, the Safe Haven Consortium studied the Safe Haven Baby Box through the support and request of DCFS. The Consortium promotes a safe handoff of the infant to an individual as it allows for the child and relinquishing parent's safety, health, and well-being to be immediately addressed. DCFS has concerns in regards to Safe Haven Baby Boxes as the child's physical and emotional safety is paramount as well as the surrendering parent, and there is insufficient information to support that the use of the Baby Box device ensures that safety. DCFS and the Safe Haven Consortium will continue its' diligence in implementing best practice around Safe Haven relinquishments and increasing public awareness on Safe Haven.