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400 OBJECTIVE

Correspondence is one of the ways through which the Department secures information essential to its effective administration and is an important channel through which the Department interprets its programs and policies to the public. It is also a method to supply specific data to interested persons making inquiries.

410 CONFIDENTIALITY IN CORRESPONDENCE

Careful attention must be given to the regulations relating to confidentiality.

In dealing with correspondence you may not reveal information about the applicant/recipient without his/her specific permission. However, it must be recognized that there are occasions when the worker must use his/her judgment, based upon a decision of how he/she can best serve the applicant/recipient under the conditions as they exist.

The purpose of much of the correspondence of the Department is related to the securing of verifications necessary to the establishment of eligibility. It must be kept in mind that the applicant/recipient has the right to choose not to qualify for assistance rather than to agree to correspondence which would reveal information about him or his situation.

The requirement that permission be obtained before correspondence is sent may mean that the applicant/recipient agrees to all correspondence necessary to carry out a certain procedure and not that his/her permission is obtained for each letter.

The regulations concerning confidentiality apply to both letters and forms which leave the Department and to replies to inquiries as well as to inquiries.

411 INQUIRIES OR COMPLAINTS

Letters which are requesting information or making a complaint may be received from other agencies, institutions, recipients of assistance or individuals within the community. These letters may request information of a general nature but more often are written to seek information about a specific applicant/recipient.

Letters of inquiry or complaint should be answered.

412 APPOINTMENT LETTERS

In the interest of courtesy and efficiency, home visits should not be made without arranging an appointment either by telephone or letter except in cases of investigations by the Office of Inspector General, Child Protective Services, Adult Protective Services or other entities investigating potential wrongdoing.

An appointment letter may be very brief but should always state a reason for the visit, give a proposed date and time and request that the applicant/recipient notify the worker if the time is not convenient for him/her. The letter should be mailed sufficiently in advance to give the applicant/recipient time to reply. While it may not always be possible to give an exact time for the appointment, the worker can usually specify an approximate time, i.e., morning or afternoon.

Copies of personal letters or form appointment letters which are relevant to denials or closures based on inability to locate the applicant/recipient or on his/her failure to cooperate in determining his/her eligibility must be retained in the case record.