



AN ACT REVISING LAWS RELATING TO REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT; REQUIRING AUDIO RECORDING OF REPORTS; REQUIRING CERTAIN INFORMATION TO BE REQUESTED; REQUIRING FALSE REPORTS BE REFERRED TO A COUNTY ATTORNEY; AND AMENDING SECTIONS 41-3-201 AND 45-7-203, MCA.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

Section 1. Department procedures for reports -- recording -- notifications. (1) A department employee receiving a report of abuse or neglect pursuant to this part shall:

- (a) obtain the information and provide the notifications specified in this section; and
- (b) make an audio recording when a report is made by phone. The department shall retain the recording in the same manner as provided for safety and risk assessments in 41-3-202.

(2) A department employee receiving a report of abuse or neglect shall request the following information:

- (a) the specific facts giving rise to the reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect and the source or sources of the information; and
- (b) (i) if the person making the report is required under 41-3-201 to report suspected abuse or neglect, the person's name and telephone number and the capacity that makes the person a mandatory reporter under 41-3-201; or
- (ii) if the person making the report is not a mandatory reporter under 41-3-201, the person's name and telephone number. If the person is unwilling to provide the information, the person receiving the report shall notify the caller that if the caller suspects the child is at serious risk of imminent harm, to call 9-1-1 so the call will be prioritized as an emergency.

(3) Reports made under this part are confidential as provided in 41-3-205. The privacy of the

person making the report must be protected as provided in 41-3-205(3)(d) and (3)(h).

(4) A department employee receiving a report pursuant to 41-3-201 shall:

(a) to the greatest extent possible, attempt to obtain the name and phone number of the person making the report and document any other identifying information available, including but not limited to the caller's phone number when identified by the phone system; and

(b) if the report is being made by phone, notify the caller that the report is being recorded and the person's identity will be kept confidential.

Section 2. Right of aggrieved party. (1) A person who is alleged to be a perpetrator of abuse or neglect in a report made under this part may file a complaint with the county attorney if the person believes the report was false or made with malicious intent. The county attorney shall investigate the complaint, including obtaining any recordings made of the reports.

(2) If the ombudsman suspects that a report was made with false or malicious intent and may be considered an offense under 45-7-203, the ombudsman shall report the matter to the county attorney having jurisdiction of the matter.

Section 3. Section 41-3-201, MCA, is amended to read:

"41-3-201. Reports. (1) When the professionals and officials listed in subsection (2) know or have reasonable cause to suspect, as a result of information they receive in their professional or official capacity, that a child is abused or neglected by anyone regardless of whether the person suspected of causing the abuse or neglect is a parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare, they shall report the matter promptly to the department of public health and human services. The department shall follow the provisions of [section 1] in taking the report.

(2) Professionals and officials required to report are:

(a) a physician, resident, intern, or member of a hospital's staff engaged in the admission, examination, care, or treatment of persons;

(b) a nurse, osteopath, chiropractor, podiatrist, medical examiner, coroner, dentist, optometrist, or any other health or mental health professional;

(c) religious healers;

(d) school teachers, other school officials, and employees who work during regular school hours;

(e) a social worker licensed pursuant to Title 37, child protection specialist, operator or employee of any registered or licensed day-care or substitute care facility, staff of a resource and referral grant program organized under 52-2-711 or of a child and adult food care program, or an operator or employee of a child-care facility;

(f) a foster care, residential, or institutional worker;

(g) a peace officer or other law enforcement official;

(h) a member of the clergy, as defined in 15-6-201(2)(b);

(i) a guardian ad litem or a court-appointed advocate who is authorized to investigate a report of alleged abuse or neglect;

(j) an employee of an entity that contracts with the department to provide direct services to children; and

(k) an employee of the department while in conduct of the employee's duties.

(3) A professional listed in subsection (2)(a) or (2)(b) involved in the delivery or care of an infant shall report to the department any infant known to the professional to be affected by a dangerous drug, as defined in 50-32-101.

(4) Any person may make a report under this section if the person knows or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is abused or neglected. The department shall follow the provisions of [section 1] when taking the report.

(5) (a) When a professional or official required to report under subsection (2) makes a report, the department:

(i) may share information with:

(A) that professional or official; or

(B) other individuals with whom the professional or official works in an official capacity if the individuals are part of a team that responds to matters involving the child or the person about whom the report was made and the professional or official has asked that the information be shared with the individuals; and

(ii) shall share information with the individuals listed in subsections (5)(a)(i)(A) and (5)(a)(i)(B) on

specific request. Information shared pursuant to this subsection (5)(a)(ii) may be limited to the outcome of the investigation and any subsequent action that will be taken on behalf of the child who is the subject of the report.

(b) The department may provide information in accordance with 41-3-202(8) and also share information about the investigation, limited to its outcome and any subsequent action that will be taken on behalf of the child who is the subject of the report.

(c) Individuals who receive information pursuant to this subsection (5) shall maintain the confidentiality of the information as required by 41-3-205.

(6) (a) Except as provided in subsection (6)(b) or (6)(c), a person listed in subsection (2) may not refuse to make a report as required in this section on the grounds of a physician-patient or similar privilege.

(b) A member of the clergy or a priest is not required to make a report under this section if:

(i) the knowledge or suspicion of the abuse or neglect came from a statement or confession made to the member of the clergy or the priest in that person's capacity as a member of the clergy or as a priest;

(ii) the statement was intended to be a part of a confidential communication between the member of the clergy or the priest and a member of the church or congregation; and

(iii) the person who made the statement or confession does not consent to the disclosure by the member of the clergy or the priest.

(c) A member of the clergy or a priest is not required to make a report under this section if the communication is required to be confidential by canon law, church doctrine, or established church practice.

(7) The reports referred to under this section must contain:

(a) the names and addresses of the child and the child's parents or other persons responsible for the child's care;

(b) to the extent known, the child's age and the nature and extent of the child's injuries, including any evidence of previous injuries;

(c) any other information that the maker of the report believes might be helpful in establishing the cause of the injuries or showing the willful neglect and the identity of the person or persons responsible for the injury or neglect; and

(d) the facts that led the person reporting to believe that the child has suffered injury or injuries or willful neglect, within the meaning of this chapter."

Section 4. Section 45-7-203, MCA, is amended to read:

"45-7-203. Unsworn falsification to authorities. (1) A person commits an offense under this section if, with the purpose to mislead a public servant in performing an official function, the person:

- (a) makes any written or verbal false statement that the person does not believe to be true;
- (b) purposely creates a false impression in a written application for any pecuniary or other benefit by omitting information necessary to prevent statements from being misleading;
- (c) submits or invites reliance on any writing that the person knows to be forged, altered, or otherwise lacking in authenticity; or
- (d) submits or invites reliance on any sample, specimen, map, boundary mark, or other object that the person knows to be false.

(2) A person convicted of an offense under this section shall be fined not to exceed \$500 or be imprisoned in the county jail for any term not to exceed 6 months, or both."

Section 5. Codification instruction. [Sections 1 and 2] are intended to be codified as an integral part of Title 41, chapter 3, part 2, and the provisions of Title 41, chapter 3, part 2, apply to [sections 1 and 2].

- END -

I hereby certify that the within bill,
HB 461, originated in the House.

Chief Clerk of the House

Speaker of the House

Signed this _____ day
of _____, 2023.

President of the Senate

Signed this _____ day
of _____, 2023.

HOUSE BILL NO. 461

INTRODUCED BY L. SHELDON-GALLOWAY

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