

**\*\*\*\*ALERT\*\*\*\***

## **NOTICE OF CHANGE IN CHILD ABUSE REPORTING**

**PERTAINS TO: Hospitals, Clinics, Schools, and Organizations Responsible for the Care of Children**

Public Chapter 185 of 2005 deletes the language in T.C.A. 37-1-403 that makes provisions for the reporting of suspected child abuse through a designated official of a hospital, clinic, school, or agency/organization. The responsibility for reporting suspected abuse/neglect now lies with the individual who suspects that child abuse or neglect has occurred. Therefore, individual organization policies allowing a staff person to report suspected abuse or neglect to the person in charge of the organization, or that person's designee, will no longer be in compliance with state law. Please immediately update your policies regarding the reporting of child abuse to reflect these changes and ensure your staff is notified of the change in policy.

The bottom line for all hospitals, clinics, schools, and any other organization responsible for the care of children: If you are an individual who suspects child abuse, you have a legal obligation to report it to DCS or others mandated to receive these reports. You may no longer fulfill your legal obligation by reporting it to a designated person within your organization. Pursuant to T.C.A. 37-1-412, failing to report is a Class A misdemeanor and is punishable by a fine not to exceed two thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,500).

In addition to the Department of Children's Services, individuals may report suspected child abuse/neglect to the Juvenile Court Judge having jurisdiction over the child, the Sheriff of the county where the child resides, or the Chief law enforcement officer of the municipality where the child resides. Persons reporting to the Department should call the Department of Children's Services statewide hotline. There are two toll-free numbers, and they are operational 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

**1-877-54ABUSE (1-877-542-2873) and 1-877-237-0004**

For more information about this change or child abuse reporting, you may contact your local office of the Department of Children's Services or your established DCS contact.