



CDSS

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STATE OF CALIFORNIA—HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

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EDMUND G. BROWN JR.  
GOVERNOR

May 26, 2017

ALL COUNTY LETTER NO. 17-39

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS  
ALL CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS  
ALL CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PROGRAM MANAGERS  
ALL CDSS ADOPTION REGIONAL AND FIELD OFFICES  
ALL TITLE IV-E TRIBES  
ALL CDSS COMMUNITY CARE LICENSING DIVISION (CCLD)  
LICENSING PROGRAM MANAGERS  
ALL CDSS CCLD COUNTY LIAISONS

SUBJECT: LICENSING ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION RECORDS SYSTEM (LAARS)  
ACCESS CHANGE AND REQUIREMENTS FOR USE RELATED TO  
RESOURCE FAMILY APPROVAL (RFA)

REFERENCE: [WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE \(W&I\) SECTION 16519.5](#);  
[HEALTH AND SAFETY CODE \(H&S\) SECTION 1517](#); RFA WRITTEN  
DIRECTIVES; ALL COUNTY LETTERS (ACL) [16-10](#), [16-58](#), [16-110](#)  
[AND 17-16](#); PROVIDER INFORMATION NOTICE (PIN) [17-02-CRP](#).

The purpose of this ACL is to provide counties with information regarding the reporting of administrative actions, including, but not limited to, Notices of Action (NOA) and administrative actions related to the RFA Program. Reporting of administrative actions is mandated for compliance with requirements for the statewide implementation of RFA that occurred on January 1, 2017. Funding for these activities is included in the RFA allocation. For more information, please refer to [County Fiscal Letter No. 16/17-45](#).

This ACL specifically provides information relating to the submission, maintenance, access, and review of prior administrative actions that must be considered as part of the RFA applicant process. Upon discovering records relating to a prior administrative action, a county must carefully review the records to determine if the prior action affects the decision to approve an applicant, grant an exemption, or take other action against an individual. If, after discussing the case internally, a county is uncertain of the impact of a prior action may have on the ability to approve an applicant, a legal consult may be necessary. For administrative actions where the individual has lifetime exclusion, per

REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- State Law Change
- Federal Law or Regulation Change
- Court Order
- Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- Initiated by CDSS

RFA Written Directives, the county shall cease reviewing the application as the individual is required to request a petition for reinstatement from the program that excluded that individual.

To facilitate maintenance and access to these records, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) has upgraded and enhanced the LAARS to be inclusive of an additional database for NOAs issued to Resource Families. In addition to providing access to records relating to county and state licensing administrative actions, the LAARS will now also include records regarding NOAs and administrative actions against Resource Families. It will provide counties with a system to submit and access RFA NOAs regarding an application denial, rescission of approval, denial or rescission of a criminal record exemption, or an exclusion action.

The updated LAARS will also include a secure web database for counties to quickly and securely send supporting evidence from case file documents (e.g., police reports, Written Report) and Statement of Facts to CDSS' Legal Division per the reporting requirements described below. This database will be used when a NOA is appealed and there is a pending administrative action against a Resource Family or individual and CDSS' Legal Division represents the county in that administrative action.

## **BACKGROUND**

Prior to implementation of RFA, the approval of licensed foster parents included a review of an applicant's history related to any administrative actions taken by CDSS, such as a license denial, revocation or exclusions. The Licensing Information System (LIS) and LAARS were established for the purpose of ensuring administrative actions were inclusive of the criminal background check process. The LIS contains information related to administrative actions taken against facilities, families or individuals licensed by CDSS and the LAARS contains information related to administrative actions against individuals, facilities and county licensed foster family homes. The process for reviewing administrative actions using the LIS and the LAARS has not changed and will be used as part of background check for Resource Family applicants (families and individuals).

However, ***LAARS now requires unique user Identifications (IDs) and passwords.***

For non-licensing counties, use of the LAARS will be a new process. More information on using the LAARS is attached to this ACL. Additionally, a step-by-step user's manual with screenshots is available on the LAARS website.

## **COUNTY DESIGNATED LAARS ADMINISTRATOR**

The LAARS is located on CDSS' secure Internet website at <https://laars.dss.ca.gov/LAARS>. This link will be active July 1, 2017. Due to the confidential and personal identifying information reported on the stored documentation, individual user IDs and passwords are now required to access the system.

Counties will be responsible for designating a single county site administrator for the LAARS. Based on your county's needs, you may request multiple site administrators. Administrators will be responsible for administering user IDs for county users and ensuring that only employees with appropriate authorization are provided access. Documentation of issued and terminated user IDs must be kept for audit purposes. A County Administrator Guide will be distributed to all assigned county administrators with instructions on how to assist in the creation and management of individual user accounts.

To designate your county's administrator(s), complete the LAARS/NOA System Access Request Form on the LAARS homepage (also attached to the ACL) and submit to CDSS per instructions on the form. Individual system user IDs can be obtained similarly by submitting the completed form to the respective county administrator who will create the individual county user IDs. Instructions on how to set up a user account and password will be provided in the training guide available on the login page of the LAARS website.

County users who participated in the LAARS testing period WILL still need to complete the request form and designate an administrator. Previous IDs will be deleted from the testing site. The unique IDs will need to be reissued using the designated form.

**The current login process for LAARS will end June 30, 2017**, and the new individual IDs will be required to access the LAARS using the link provide above. To ensure no disruption in use of the LAARS, please ***immediately*** submit the completed and approved access form to designate your county's Administrator to CDSS LAARS System Administrator at [LAARSAdmin@dss.ca.gov](mailto:LAARSAdmin@dss.ca.gov).

### **USE OF LAARS FOR RFA**

The county must use the LAARS database for two main functions related to RFA:

- 1) To search for prior administrative actions against an RFA applicant and
- 2) To report NOAs and administrative actions against a Resource Family.

*Search for Prior Administrative Actions*

The RFA approval process requires the county to conduct a complete background check for each applicant and all adults residing or regularly present in the home of the applicant as specified per the Written Directives section 6-03A prior to approval and after approval, when necessary. As part of the background check, the county shall conduct a search for prior licensing or Resource Family-related administrative actions contained in the LIS, LAARS and NOA databases maintained by CDSS.

To meet requirements of the background check the county must:

- 1) Access the LAARS database to conduct a search for all administrative actions. If an individual is/has been known by more than one name, all names must be searched. Including as much search information as possible will narrow the search results. All actions returned for the individual will need to be reviewed. The displayed search results are divided into three sections:
  - a) The “County Only Actions” section displays results for NOAs issued to Resource Families.
    - i. If a county locates a NOA and the status line says “subsequent disposition,” then the county must look in the “CDSS Actions” section for that case’s final administrative decision.
    - ii. If the status line states “appeal received,” then the case is currently ongoing. In that case, the county should contact CDSS’ Legal Division to determine the status of the case.
  - b) The “CDSS Actions” section displays results from the LAARS which contain final administrative decisions taken against all types of homes/facilities CDSS monitors, and the individuals that work or are present in those facilities. These documents will usually supersede the NOA.
  - c) The “Actions by Other State Departments” section displays results which contain final administrative actions taken against individuals by the following state agencies:
    - Department of Public Health
    - Department of Health Care Services
    - Department of Aging
    - Emergency Management Services Authority
- 2) Request an LIS check which will yield results for state initiated administrative actions. The LIS is a separate database. Checks will be done by CDSS; however, the county must have the results of these checks prior to approving an applicant. Please see PIN 17-02-CRP for instructions on how to request an LIS check.

*Reporting NOAs and Administrative Actions*

An administrative action includes legal actions for which NOAs are issued, such as rescission of approval. For example, in a situation where a Resource Family no longer continues to meet approval standards, as outlined in the Written Directives, the county has authority to require the family to take steps to again meet those standards. This may be done through a corrective action plan or other options as described in the RFA Written Directives, section 12-03. If the Resource Family is unable or unwilling to correct deficiencies, the county has authority to take administrative action, such as rescinding their approval.

***Prior to submitting a NOA or administrative action, the county is required to have a legal consult with CDSS' consulting attorney.***

Counties are required to report to CDSS administrative actions against a Resource Family and the results of these actions by uploading the documentation into the NOA database located within the LAARS.

#### NOA Database

The NOA database, accessed via the LAARS, will allow county users to upload RFA NOAs for application denial, rescission of approval, denial or rescission of a criminal record exemption, or an exclusion action if the exclusion action occurred prior to January 1, 2017. Only persons with the assigned role of **LAARS/NOA User** will be able to upload NOAs into the system. Counties should upload NOAs as soon as possible after they are issued. This is to ensure that information in the system is accurate and up to date.

Uploading the NOA will require the user to populate fields that will be used to search for the document in the system by other counties and CDSS staff. Only the NOA is uploaded into the database. Supporting documentation and Statement of Facts are uploaded into the Legal Database. All NOAs must be uploaded in a PDF format.

The NOA will be uploaded to the system with a status of "Pending"; it is the responsibility of the county user to update the status of each NOA issued with the updated status of "No Appeal", "Appeal Received", or "Subsequent Disposition" (a decision and order from an administrative law judge or settlement agreement).

It is requested that counties upload any existing RFA NOAs within 30-days of the release of this ACL. This is to ensure all relevant information is available when approving applicants. Early implementing RFA counties may work with CDSS to develop extended time frames if necessary.

To meet reporting requirements, the following shall be uploaded by a user in the "Upload NOA" option within the LAARS:

- 1) NOAs for the denial or rescission of RFA.
- 2) NOAs for the denial or rescission of a criminal record exemption.
- 3) NOAs for the exclusion of an individual from the home of a Resource Family and an exclusion order, including actions initiated prior to the release of this ACL.
- 4) Additionally, the status of the NOA must be updated by using the “Change Status” field immediately after the county receives an appeal from the Resource Family or immediately after the NOA appeal timeframe has expired.
  - a) The county should select “appeal received” once they receive an appeal of a NOA. When the case resolves, there will be a final administrative decision from an Administrative Law Judge or there will be an agreement (e.g. stipulation, or conditional withdrawal) between the county and Resource Family that supersedes the NOA.
  - b) Once the county receives that final administrative decision, the user must update the status line from “Appeal Received” to “Subsequent Disposition.” “Subsequent disposition” means that the NOA is no longer the final administrative decision and that a subsequent administrative decision can be found in the LAARS AA section that supersedes the NOA.

In the “Upload Legal Doc” section (only available to assigned users) within LAARS, only the following shall be uploaded:

- 1) Statement of Facts and any other case file supporting documents such as the written report and police reports.

### Legal Database

To expedite the administrative action process, counties will access a secure web interface within LAARS for counties to quickly and securely send documents to CDSS’ Legal Division. This database will be restricted to designated county and CDSS users. The Legal database will allow county users to provide CDSS Legal staff with supporting documentation related to RFA cases such as police reports or the written report when the county is being represented by CDSS Legal counsel. Legal consult forms are to be sent to CDSS’ County Liaison, not uploaded into the database. County staff provided with access to the Legal Database will only be allowed to upload documents, using the “Upload Legal Doc” section, they will not be able to search the database. Documents can only be uploaded to the Legal Database by persons who have the role of **Both LAARS/NOA and Legal DB User**.

Roles are identified when requesting access to the system (see attachment). Only CDSS staff will be allowed to view and download the documents uploaded to the Legal Database.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

For information regarding RFA Program requirements, refer to the most recent version of the RFA Written Directives which can be found on the [RFA website](#). Please direct any RFA policy questions to [RFA@dss.ca.gov](mailto:RFA@dss.ca.gov)

A training guide and instructions for LAARS are available in both PDF and video format on the initial login page of the [LAARS](#) website. As not all counties are familiar with LAARS, more detailed information is attached to this ACL, as well as system technical information.

For questions regarding LAARS, contact [LAARSAdmin@dss.ca.gov](mailto:LAARSAdmin@dss.ca.gov).

For questions regarding the documents/content to be uploaded to LAARS, contact [CDSSLEGALLAARS-COUNTY@dss.ca.gov](mailto:CDSSLEGALLAARS-COUNTY@dss.ca.gov).

For questions regarding LIS, contact [CCLLISLAARSChecks@dss.ca.gov](mailto:CCLLISLAARSChecks@dss.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

***Original Document Signed By***

GREGORY E. ROSE  
Deputy Director  
Children and Family Services Division

Attachments

c: County Welfare Directors Association

## **ADDITIONAL LICENSING ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION RECORDS SYSTEM (LAARS) INFORMATION**

### **LAARS Access Information**

The system will consist of the following primary roles based upon the database and user needs. When submitting LAARS Access Request Form you will be asked to identify the level of access – either administrator or user. The administrator role is defined below. You will also be asked to identify which databases you need access to. A copy of the access form is attached and also available on the LAARS home page.

1. **Administrator:** This role will be responsible for creating users and acting as a Single Point of Contact for their respective counties. The administrator will not have the ability to search or upload documents. If the administrator needs that role also, it must also be requested.
2. **County NOA User:** This role will have the ability to upload documents to the NOA database, update the status of a NOA and search the LAARS, NOA, and State AA databases.
3. **County NOA User (view only):** This role will allow the user to view the LAARS, NOA, and State AA databases only.
4. **County Legal DB User:** This role will have the ability to upload documents to the Legal Database only.
5. **Both County NOA and County Legal DB user:** This role will combine the county NOA and County Legal DB user roles into one. Allowing user to upload both NOA and Legal documents.

### **Using the LAARS Database**

Once the system is accessed, the user can conduct a search by entering identifying information for each applicant. Step by step instructions with screen shots for accessing and using the system are included on the initial page of the website.

The LAARS contains four sections of the database: CDSS Actions, County Only Actions, Actions by Other State Departments, and the Legal Database. The user will search for all the administrative actions from a single search page with the results being displayed by category. The Legal Database cannot be searched by counties and is only to upload supporting legal documentation for those users who have access.

The LAARS will allow query by one or more personal identifiers such as name or date-of-birth. The system will pull back all potential matches. When searching to find a specific case in the administrative actions section it is recommended to search by the case number, if known.



## Attachment A

When searching to determine if an applicant has any administrative actions or NOAs enter in as many identifiers as you have available to help narrow the search results. If the query does not return a match with any of the personal identifiers that means there are no identified licensing or Resource Family Approval administrative actions against the individual contained within LAARS.

If an administrative action match is obtained, the system will indicate the current status for each administrative action as follows:

- AA: Excluded: a Decision and Order or Stipulation has been entered to deny an application, revoke or rescind the individual's license, approval or certification, to exclude them from a facility or to deny or rescind a criminal record exemption.
- AA: Probation: a Decision and Order or Stipulation has been entered that allows the individual to be licensed, certified, or approved to work in one or more facilities, or as a Resource Family subject to certain conditions.
- AA: Filed: a Statement of Issues to deny an application or an Accusation to revoke a license or certificate rescind an approval or exclude an individual, has been served on the individual, but no final action on the case has been taken.
- AA: Closed: the case has been closed without a revocation, rescission, denial or exclusion action after issuance of the Statement of Issues or Accusation.

### **Legal Case Tracking System (LCTS)**

The existing interface with LCTS which is used by CDSS' Legal Division to track administrative actions has not changed. Information from LCTS is uploaded to LAARS to provide information regarding the administrative actions filed on behalf of CDSS. These administrative actions will be found when conducting the administrative actions search in the LAARS.

### **Licensing Information System (LIS)**

As the LAARS search only returns county initiated actions, the LIS checks will still need to be completed by CDSS for the counties to evaluate any state or county licensing administrative actions and compliance history. The LIS is a separate database that the county does not have access to search. The CDSS Community Care Licensing Division has a newly established LIS/LAARS Check Unit (LLCU) that will be performing all LIS checks on behalf of counties. Please see Provider Information Notice 17-02-CRP for additional information.

### **Secure Access Framework (SAF)**

The enhancements to the LAARS to incorporate the new NOA, State AA and Legal databases will result in an updated, secure authentication process to access the

Attachment A

system. County users will need to access the system via SAF using their personal logon ID and password.

If you experience issues logging into the system, not related to your password, please contact your county Information Technology (IT) service desk as log on issues may be related to the firewall your organization uses to protect your network infrastructure. Your IT service desk may have experienced similar issues with other applications using SAF and know how to resolve the issues.

List of CDSS applications utilizing SAF technology:

<b>County Applications developed with SAF <u>v2.0</u></b>
e-IEVS (Pending Release)

If your IT service desk is unable to resolve the problem, instruct them to contact CDSS LAARS administrator at [LAARSAdmin@dss.ca.gov](mailto:LAARSAdmin@dss.ca.gov). If necessary, CDSS LAARS administrator will report the problem to CDSS IT Help Desk for assistance in resolving the issue. The CDSS LAARS administrator will report any known technical resolution(s) to your IT service desk to assist in resolving future reported issues.

**TECHNICAL DETAILS**

Additionally, site administrators are responsible for working with their county IT staff to ensure hardware is updated with the most recent Web Browser versions of either, Explorer, Firefox, Safari or Google Chrome so that generated e-mails sent from [donotreply-DSS-SAF@dss.ca.gov](mailto:donotreply-DSS-SAF@dss.ca.gov) (162.2.111.10) are not blocked by firewalls.