

# Erie County Department of Social Services shares resources for families in crisis

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month and the Erie County Department of Social Services is reminding residents that help and supports are available for families feeling increased stress as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many families are touched by job losses and reductions in hours, children who would normally be at school under the watchful eyes of teachers and administrators are confined to home with parents under stress, and family celebrations have been cancelled due to the ongoing need for social distancing.

Commissioner of Social Services Marie Cannon said, "Child welfare agencies across the country are reporting decreased numbers of calls to their respective child abuse reporting lines, and Erie County child welfare professionals are observing a similar trend. We are concerned that, while children are confined at home, they may be subjected to unobserved abuse or maltreatment. We understand that parents are under stress, and we are asking Erie County parents and other caregivers to please reach out if they need help during this difficult time."

The following resources are available to parents and other caregivers who need support and assistance:

•The Family Help Line, operated by the Family Help Center, is a resource available 24 hours per day, seven days a week for anxious, overwhelmed or upset caregivers. Understanding listeners

are available at 892-2172 to provide information and resources to help address the concerns that prompted the call. Callers are allowed to remain anonymous. Moreover, 90% of the caregivers who contact the Family Help Line are able to positively change their behavior toward their children to allow those children to remain safely in their homes.

•EPIC (Every Person Influences Children) has launched a parent support line at 332-4111. The parent support line operates weekdays between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. It is staffed by EPIC team members trained in parenting and social work.

Parents are welcome to call in for help with stress management, establishing homeschool routines, positive discipline strategies, and any issues that arise while being home with their children. EPIC recognizes parents are being asked to juggle a lot right now, and, while EPIC has shifted to a primarily virtual service model, it wants to provide support and resources for parents. The EPIC parent support line is open to all families, including those that have not previously attended EPIC programming.

•Crisis Services operates several helplines to assist Erie County residents with challenges such as addiction, mental health disorders, and domestic violence. During these uncertain times, Crisis Services understands it is normal to have a wide range of emotions, responses and reactions.

A press release noted, "A

stressful event can have an impact on anyone, and especially for those with preexisting conditions. Their team of trained counselors is ready to offer support and guidance to the community. They have the protocols and resources in place to maintain a high level of care and compassion when you or someone you know needs it most."

At Crisis Services:

- ✓ The 24-hour crisis helpline number is 834-3131.
- ✓ The 24-hour addictions hotline number is 831-7007.
- ✓ The 24-hour domestic violence helpline is 862-HELP.
- ✓ Crisis Services also operates a kids helpline at 834-1144.

The Family Justice Center is a resource for families experiencing interpersonal violence. FJC services are available by phone, email, and an online chat-box (<https://www.fjcsafe.org/>) to help those who need support. FJC urges those having an emergency or who need immediate help to call 911. For help with other questions or services, call the FJC SafeLine at 558-SAFE (7233). Representatives will be available to help with safety planning and links to needed services during this time.

FJC encourages the public to stay tuned to its website and social media channels for the latest updates.

For more information on the Erie County Department of Social Services, visit <https://www2.erie.gov/socialservices/>.

## COVID-19 NEWS

### Poloncarz issues emergency order closing campgrounds

Erie County Executive Mark C. Poloncarz on Tuesday issued a local emergency order closing all campgrounds, as defined by 10 NYCRR 7-3.1, which require a permit to operate under the New York state sanitary code. The order also prohibits the use, at any campground within Erie County, of any camping cabin, camping unit, campsite, or seasonal campsite as defined by 10 NYCRR 7-3.1, by any individual at any time.

"Based on reports we've received, and as approved by New York state, I have signed this emergency order on campgrounds that will go into effect at 9 a.m. tomorrow. Not only do campgrounds allow for large gatherings of people in contradiction of necessary social distancing measures but, under NYS law, campgrounds must also be monitored and reviewed by our public health sanitarians, all of whom are currently engaged in stopping the spread of the coronavirus in our community," Poloncarz said. "Our Public Health team is already being stretched in the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Closing these campgrounds makes better use of our resources and will help to protect our community."

### Higgins announces 'Get My Payment'

Congressman Brian Higgins announced residents can now check the status of direct payments provided through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. On Wednesday, the U.S. Treasury announced the launch of the "Get My Payment" app, which allows Americans to track the status of their emergency relief funding and add bank direct deposit information if the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) doesn't already have it on file.

Higgins said, "With people out of work, household budgets are stretched thin. Direct payments help support the most urgent needs of Western New Yorkers during this public health emergency."

Congress approved direct economic relief to Americans through the CARES Act on March 27. The IRS will disburse a \$1,200 payment to every eligible adult (\$2,400 for joint filers), plus an additional \$500 per dependent child up to age 17. Payments gradually phasedown for individual incomes exceeding \$75,000, \$112,500 for head of households, or \$150,000 for joint filers. Once income surpasses these thresholds, the check amount is reduced incrementally.

Higgins warned residents to beware of potential scams.

The Treasury began distribution of this funding, delivering relief to approximately 80 million Americans this week. For additional information, visit the IRS direct payment webpage at: <https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/economic-impact-payments>.

### SAFER Grant

Congressman Brian Higgins announced the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant application period is now open with a deadline of 5 p.m. May 15.

SAFER grants are aimed at increasing the number of firefighters and enhancing a department's ability to comply with federal standards to ensure communities have adequate protection from fire and fire-related hazards. Congress allocated \$350 million for the SAFER grant program in fiscal year 2019.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency will host several webinars to walk departments through the application process. The webinar schedule is available at: [www.fema.gov/afgp-webinar-schedule](http://www.fema.gov/afgp-webinar-schedule). Departments with questions can also contact the fire grant help desk at [firegrants@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:firegrants@fema.dhs.gov) or 1-866-274-0960. More information on the SAFER fire grant program is available at [www.fema.gov/staffing-adequate-fire-emergency-response-grants](http://www.fema.gov/staffing-adequate-fire-emergency-response-grants).

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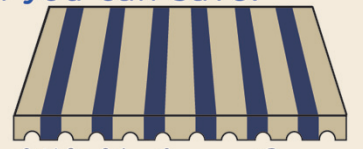
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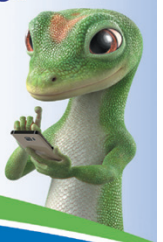
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