

other reports prepared by others whether pertaining to individuals with mental illness or to general conditions affecting their health or safety.

(h) A P&A which is a public P&A system shall be free from hiring freezes, reductions in force, prohibitions on staff travel, or other policies imposed by the State to the extent that such policies would impact program staff or activities funded with Federal dollars and would prevent the P&A system from carrying out its mandates under the Act.

(i) A P&A system may exercise its authority under State law where the authority exceeds the authority required by the Act. However, State law must not diminish the required authority of the Act.

**§51.32 Resolving disputes.**

(a) Each P&A system is encouraged to develop and employ techniques such as those involving negotiation, conciliation and mediation to resolve disputes early in the protection and advocacy process.

(b) Disputes should be resolved whenever possible through nonadversarial process involving negotiation, mediation and conciliation. Consistent with State and Federal laws and canons of professional responsibility, family members should be involved in this process, as appropriate, where the individual with mental illness is:

- (1) A minor,
- (2) Legally competent and chooses to involve the family member, or
- (3) Legally incompetent and the legal guardian, conservator or other legal representative is a family member or the legal guardian, conservator or other legal representative chose to involve the family member.

(c) A P&A system must exhaust in a timely manner all administrative remedies, where appropriate, prior to initiating legal action in a Federal or State court.

(d) Paragraph (c) of this section does not apply to any legal action instituted to prevent or eliminate imminent serious harm to an individual with mental illness nor does it apply in circumstances where administrative procedures do not exist. If in pursuing administrative remedies, the P&A system

determines that any matter with respect to an individual with mental illness with mental illness with not be resolved within a reasonable time, the P&A system may pursue alternative remedies, including initiating legal action.

(e) A P&A system shall be held to the standard of exhaustion of remedies provided under State and Federal law. The Act imposes no additional burden respecting exhaustion of remedies.

**§§ 51.33-51.40 [Reserved]**

**Subpart D—Access to Records, Facilities and Individuals**

**§51.41 Access to records.**

(a) Access to records shall be extended promptly to all authorized agents of a P&A system.

(b) A P&A system shall have access to the records of any of the following individuals with mental illness:

(1) An individual who is a client of the P&A system if authorized by that individual or the legal guardian, conservator or other legal representative.

(2) An individual, including an individual who has died or whose whereabouts is unknown to whom all of the following conditions apply:

- (i) The individual, due to his or her mental or physical condition, is unable to authorize the P&A system to have access.
- (ii) The individual does not have a legal guardian, conservator or other legal representative, or the individual's guardian is the State or one of its political subdivisions; and

(iii) A complaint or report has been received and the P&A system has determined that there is probable cause to believe that the individual has been or may be subject to abuse or neglect.

(3) An individual who has a legal guardian, conservator, or other legal representative, with respect to whom a complaint or report has been received by the P&A system and with respect to whom the P&A system has determined that there is probable cause to believe that the health or safety of the individual is in serious and immediate jeopardy, whenever all of the following conditions exist:

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(i) The P&A system has made a good faith effort to contact the representative upon prompt receipt of the representative's name and address;

(ii) The P&A system has made a good faith effort to offer assistance to the representative to resolve the situation; and

(iii) The representative has failed or refused to act on behalf of the individual.

(c) Information and individual records, whether written or in another medium, draft or final, including handwritten notes, electronic files, photographs or video or audio tape records, which shall be available to the P&A system under the Act shall include, but not be limited to:

(1) Information and individual records, obtained in the course of providing intake, assessment, evaluation, supportive and other services, including medical records, financial records, and reports prepared or received by a member of the staff of a facility or program rendering care or treatment. This includes records stored or maintained in locations other than the facility or program as long as the system has obtained appropriate consent consistent with section 105(a)(4) of the Act. The system shall request of facilities that in requesting records from service providers or other facilities on residents that they indicate in the release form the records may be subject to review by a system.

(2) Reports prepared by an agency charged with investigating abuse neglect, or injury occurring at a facility rendering care or treatment, or by or for the facility itself, that describe any or all of the following:

(i) Abuse, neglect, or injury occurring at the facility;

(ii) The steps taken to investigate the incidents;

(iii) Reports and records, including personnel records, prepared or maintained by the facility, in connection with such reports of incidents; or

(iv) Supporting information that was relied upon in creating a report, including all information and records used or reviewed in preparing reports of abuse, neglect or injury such as records which describe persons who were interviewed, physical and documentary evidence

that was reviewed, and the related investigative findings.

(3) Discharge planning records.

(4) Reports prepared by individuals and entities performing certification or licensure reviews, or by professional accreditation organizations, as well as related assessments prepared for the facility by its staff, contractors or related entities, except that nothing in this section is intended to preempt State law protecting records produced by medical care evaluation or peer review committees.

(5) Professional, performance, building or other safety standards, demographic and statistical information relating to the facility.

(d) A P&A system shall have reasonable access and authority to interview and examine all relevant records of any facility service recipient (consistent with the provisions of section 105(a)(4) of the Act) or employee.

(e) A P&A system shall be permitted to inspect and copy records, subject to a reasonable charge to offset duplicating costs.

**§ 51.42 Access to facilities and residents.**

(a) Access to facilities and residents shall be extended to all authorized agents of a P&A system.

(b) A P&A system shall have reasonable unaccompanied access to public and private facilities and programs in the State which render care or treatment for individuals with mental illness, and to all areas of the facility which are used by residents or are accessible to residents. The P&A system shall have reasonable unaccompanied access to residents at all times necessary to conduct a full investigation of an incident of abuse or neglect. This authority shall include the opportunity to interview any facility service recipient, employee, or other persons, including the person thought to be the victim of such abuse, who might be reasonably believed by the system to have knowledge of the incident under investigation. Such access shall be afforded, upon request, by the P&A system when:

(1) An incident is reported or a complaint is made to the P&A system;