§ 136. Protection of public welfare records. 1. The names or addresses of persons applying for or receiving public assistance and care shall not be included in any published report or printed in any newspaper or reported at any public meeting except meetings of the county board of supervisors, city council, town board or other board or body authorized and required to appropriate funds for public assistance and care in and for such county, city or town; nor shall such names and addresses and the amount received by or expended for such persons be disclosed except to the commissioner of social services or his authorized representative, such county, city or town board or body or its authorized representative, any other body or official required to have such information properly to discharge its or his duties, or, by authority of such county, city or town appropriating board or body or of the social services official of the county, city or town, to a person or agency considered entitled to such information. However, if a bona fide news disseminating firm or organization makes a written request to the social services official or the appropriating board or body of a county, city or town to allow inspection by an authorized representative of such firm or organization of the books and records of the disbursements made by such county, city or town for public assistance and care, such requests shall be granted within five days and such firm or organization shall be considered entitled to the information contained in such books and records, provided such firm or organization shall give assurances in writing that it will not publicly disclose, or participate or acquiesce in the public disclosure of, the names and addresses of applicants for and recipients of public assistance and care except as expressly permitted by subdivision four. If such firm or organization shall, after giving such assurance, publicly disclose, or participate or acquiesce in the public disclosure of, the names and addresses of applicants for or recipients of public assistance and care except as expressly permitted by subdivision four, then such firm or organization shall be deemed to have violated this section and such violation shall constitute a misdemeanor. As used herein a news disseminating firm or organization shall mean and include: a newspaper; a newspaper service association or agency; a magazine; a radio or television station or system; a motion picture news agency.

2. All communications and information relating to a person receiving public assistance or care obtained by any social services official, service officer, or employee in the course of his or her work shall be considered confidential and, except as otherwise provided in this section, shall be disclosed only to the commissioner, or his or her authorized representative, the commissioner of labor, or his or her authorized representative, the commissioner of health, or his or her authorized representative, the welfare inspector general, or his or her authorized representative, the county board of supervisors, city council, town board or other board or body authorized and required to appropriate funds for public assistance and care in and for such county, city or town or its authorized representative or, by authority of the county, city or town social services official, to a person or agency considered entitled to such information. Nothing herein shall preclude a social services official from reporting to an appropriate agency or official, including law enforcement agencies or officials, known or suspected instances of physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or exploitation, sexual contact with a minor or negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child of which the official becomes aware in the administration of public assistance and care nor shall it preclude communication with the federal immigration and naturalization service regarding the immigration status of any individual.

3. Nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent registration in a central index or social service exchange for the purpose of preventing duplication and of coordinating the work of public and private agencies.

4. No person or agency shall solicit, disclose, receive, make use of, or authorize, knowingly permit, participate in, or acquiesce in the use of, any information relating to any applicant for or recipient of public assistance or care for commercial or political purposes. Nothing in this or the other subdivisions of this section shall be deemed to prohibit bona fide news media from disseminating news, in the ordinary course of their lawful business, relating to the identity of persons charged with the commission of crimes or offenses involving their application for or receipt of public assistance and care, including the

names and addresses of such applicants or recipients who are charged with the commission of such crimes or offenses.

5. A social services official shall disclose to a federal, state or local law enforcement officer, upon request of the officer, the current address of any recipient of family assistance, or safety net assistance if the duties of the officer include the location or apprehension of the recipient and the officer furnishes the social services official with the name of the recipient and notifies the agency that such recipient is fleeing to avoid prosecution, custody or confinement after conviction, under the laws of the place from which the recipient is fleeing, for a crime or an attempt to commit a crime which is a felony under the laws of the place from which the recipient is fleeing, or which, in the case of the state of New Jersey, is a high misdemeanor under the laws of that state, or is violating a condition of probation or parole imposed under a federal or state law or has information that is necessary for the officer to conduct his or her official duties. In a request for disclosure pursuant to this subdivision, such law enforcement officer shall endeavor to include identifying information to help ensure that the social services official discloses only the address of the person sought and not the address of a person with the same or similar name.