§ 423-a. Child advocacy centers established. 1. The office of children and family services shall to the greatest extent practicable facilitate the establishment of child advocacy centers in every region of the state so that child victims of sexual abuse or serious physical abuse have reasonable access to such a center and so that their cases are handled in an expert and timely manner, by a coordinated and cooperative effort that minimizes trauma to the children and their non-offending family members. Child advocacy centers shall be established by either a governmental entity or a private, nonprofit incorporated agency and shall meet the state office of children and family services program standards for child advocacy centers approval and strive to co-locate members of the local multi-disciplinary team at the child advocacy center.

2. Child advocacy centers may assist in the investigation of child abuse and maltreatment cases and shall provide at a minimum for the following:

(a) a comfortable, private setting that is both physically and psychologically safe for children;

(b) sound program, fiscal and administrative practices;

(c) policies, practices and procedures that are culturally competent; for the purpose of this paragraph "culturally competent" is defined as the capacity to function in more than one culture, requiring the ability to appreciate, understand and interact with members of diverse populations within the local community;

(d) a multidisciplinary investigative team established pursuant to subdivision six of section four hundred twenty-three of this article;

(e) a written set of interagency protocols for an interdisciplinary and coordinated approach to the investigation of child abuse;

(f) forensic interviews to be conducted in a manner which is neutral and fact-finding and coordinated to avoid duplicative interviewing;

(g) specialized medical evaluation and treatment as part of the multidisciplinary investigative team response, either at the center or through coordination with and referral to other appropriate treatment providers;

(h) specialized mental health services as part of the multidisciplinary investigative team response, either at the center or

through coordination with and referral to other appropriate treatment providers;

(i) victim support and advocacy as part of the multidisciplinary team investigative team response, either at the center or through coordination with and referral to other appropriate treatment providers;

(j) a routine interdisciplinary case review process for purposes of decision making, problem solving, systems coordination and information sharing concerning case status and services needed by the child and family;

(k) a comprehensive tracking system for monitoring case process and tracking case outcomes for team members; and

(l) a process for evaluating its effectiveness and its operation.

3. Child advocacy centers may also provide space for medical evaluation, therapeutic intervention, support services for child abuse victims and their families, community education about child abuse, and any other services the center deems critical to the provision of service to child victims and their families and the multidisciplinary investigation of abuse allegations.

4. Any child advocacy center established prior to the effective date of this section shall, within six months of the effective date of this section, revise its policies and practices to comply with subdivision two of this section. No organization shall refer to itself as a child advocacy center unless it complies with this section.

5. (a) The files, reports, records, communications, working papers or videotaped interviews used or developed in providing services under this section are confidential. Provided, however, that disclosure may be made to members of a multidisciplinary investigative team who are engaged in the investigation of a particular case and who need access to the information in order to perform their duties for purposes consistent with this section and to other employees of a child advocacy center who are involved in tracking cases for the child advocacy center. Disclosure shall also be made for the purpose of investigation, prosecution and/or adjudication in any relevant court proceeding or, upon written release by any non-offending parent, for the purpose of counseling for the child

victim.

(b) Any public or private department, agency or organization may share with a child advocacy center information that is made confidential by law when it is needed to provide or secure services pursuant to this section. Confidential information shared with or provided to a center remains the property of the providing organization.

(c) The office of children and family services shall have access to all records created or maintained by a child advocacy center in order to carry out the responsibilities of that office pursuant to this title.