

## Administrative Policy No. 14.18

**Subject:** Email and Voicemail Responses and Teams Backgrounds

**Information Contact:** Office of Communications and Government Affairs  
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**Authorizing Source:** DSHS Secretary

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**Approved By:** Original signed by Pearlette J. Ramos  
Senior Director, Office of Justice and Civil Rights

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### Purpose

To promote timely redirection of clients, patients, stakeholders, and staff with timely responses through establishing expectations of voicemail greetings and email responses. Providing guidelines for Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) employee's email signatures and other email features. And to provide employees with Teams and other virtual meeting platforms with DSHS background protocols.

### Scope

This policy applies to all DSHS employees who use email, telephones, Teams, and other virtual meeting platforms, and including teletypewriters videophone equipment, TTY.

### Additional Guidance

Contact your local telecommunications coordinator for information about telephone, voicemail, and Teams features.

Contact your local IT support person or the [DSHS Technology Operations Center](#) for information about email features.

### Policy Requirements

**A. Voicemail**

1. DSHS employees with voicemail capabilities on their desk phone, Teams soft phone, or DSHS-issued cell phone must have a personal greeting that is updated when the employee is not working their regular schedule.
2. The personal greeting must include the following information:
  - Employee name and agency name (Department of Social and Health Services, not DSHS).
  - Administration, division, program, or field office name.
  - Information about the employee's availability (such as days and hours generally in the office) and when the caller can generally expect a return call.
  - When available, instructions for obtaining immediate assistance if the employee is not available, such as identification of an alternate contact or communication of a 'zero out' option.
  - Alternate contact information, such as a department-issued cell phone or Teams soft phone, if available, where the employee might be reached.

Examples:

*"Hello, this is [your name] with the Department of Social and Health Services Community Services Office in Olympia. I am in the office today, September 6 between 7 and 4, but unable to take your call. Please leave a detailed message and I will return your call within 48 hours. To speak with another staff member press 0."*

*"Hello, this is [your name] with the Department of Social and Health Services Home & Community Service Office in Spokane. On Tuesday, September 9, I will be out of the office in the afternoon. Please leave a detailed message and I will return your call by noon on Thursday. For immediate assistance press 0."*

*"Hello, this is [your name] with the Department of Social and Health Services Office of Financial Recovery. For the week of September 8, I will be out of the office and unable to return calls until September 11th. If you need immediate assistance, please press 0 or call my co-worker Joan Evans at 360-555-4444."*

3. Voicemail and Teams messages must be responded to within 48 hours or two business days of receipt or return to work.

**B. Signature and Content**

1. Employees are required to use an email signature. The signature must include the following information:

- Employee name;
  - Position or title;
  - Administration, division, or program name;
  - Washington state Department of Social and Health Services;
  - Office and cell phone number; and
  - Email address, using the firstname.lastname@dshs.wa.gov format.
2. Where appropriate, signature blocks must include department cell phone or fax number and the mailing address of the employee's workplace or mailstop.
  3. Employees may include pronouns in their email signature.

Example of a signature:

John Doe  
Employee pronouns  
Media Relations Manager  
Office of Communications and Government Affairs  
Office of the Secretary  
Washington state Department of Social and Health Services  
(o) 360-902-0000 / (c) 360-790-0000  
1115 Washington St SE, Olympia, WA 98501  
john.doe@dshs.wa.gov

4. Emails must not include stationery, wallpaper, backgrounds, themes, or animations. Avoid exotic text colors that may be difficult to read. No logos, other artwork, or clipart may be added to the signature. Program "icons", that have been submitted by an assistant secretary and approved by the office of communications and government affairs on a case-by-case basis, may be added to the signature for specific business purposes.
5. A less formal signature block may be used for follow-up replies when appropriate, but it must still contain some contact information. For example:

John Smith  
360-902-0000

6. Inspiring quotes or similar personalized content may be included only when relevant to business communications. If included, this content must be contained within the body of the email, not in the signature.
7. Employees must use the Outlook "out of office assistant" setting to notify senders of

circumstances that impact the employee's ability to receive and respond to emails in a timely manner.

Personal or private information must not be included in "out of office" notifications.

8. "Out of office" messages must include information about when the employee will review and respond to emails as well as a point of contact (including their phone number and email address) if the sender needs assistance prior to the employee's return.
9. Employees must review, and respond as necessary, to emails and Team messages within 48 hours of receipt or return to work.
10. When an email requires a response, the employee must respond promptly. Subject to employee and unit priorities, employees should respond to senders by the date indicated in their messages.
11. The use of confidentiality notices on emails is NOT impacted by this signature block policy requirements. Confidentiality notices are not part of the signature block and considered a disclaimer that the email is not to be shared.
12. If an employee uses a photo in their account, it must be of the employee, and recognizable as such. Employees may use personal photographs on their Outlook and Teams accounts. The photo must be an unaltered photo of the employee only and recognizable as such. Other images such as caricatures, pets, scenery, or sports teams are not acceptable. Photos must be of standard size and format - preferably 192x192 pixels in PNG format. Employees can add a photo to their Outlook profile within the file selection in Outlook.
13. Exceptions to signature and content:
  - An exception would include generic inboxes, as they do not have the option for replies.
  - Inclusion of assistant attorney general directed confidentiality notices, as applicable.

**C. Out of office notifications**

1. Employees must use the Outlook "out of office assistant" setting to notify senders of circumstances that impact the employee's ability to receive and respond to emails in a timely manner.

2. Employees personal or private information must not be included in “out of office” notifications.
3. “Out of office” messages must include information about when the employee will review and respond to emails as well as a point of contact (including their phone number and email address) if the sender needs assistance prior to the employee’s return.
4. Out of office notifications should include the date an employee is out of the office, the expected return date, and a point of contact during the absence.

Example of out of office notification:

I will be out of the office Monday, January 1 and returning on Tuesday, January 2. Please contact John Smith for assistance at [john.smith@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:john.smith@dshs.wa.gov).

5. Out of office notifications should not include the specific reason or type of leave used.

#### **D. Teams and virtual meeting platforms, use of virtual background**

1. When employees are in external meetings with people outside of DSHS, employees should use official DSHS virtual backgrounds. These virtual backgrounds were created by the Office of Innovation, Strategy and Visual Communications, and are appropriately branded to convey the agency name and a professional image. The official DSHS virtual backgrounds can be located [here](#).
2. When employees are attending internal meetings with other DSHS employees only, the use of DSHS designated backgrounds, or Microsoft Teams designated backgrounds is acceptable. DSHS [designated virtual backgrounds](#) include commemorative month backgrounds, such as Juneteenth or Women’s History Month, as an example. Using personal or pictures from other sources in any virtual meeting is not acceptable.
3. There may be some instances where certain, non-DSHS backgrounds are acceptable for external use for accessibility reasons. Selecting the blurred background would be an acceptable option. Backgrounds provided in other virtual meeting platforms would be acceptable to use.

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<sup>i</sup> Housekeeping to update links.