



State of New Hampshire

Office of the Child Advocate

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Child Advocate publishes Summary of System Learning Reviews on critical incidents.

Concord, NH- The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) released a report summarizing reviews of three critical incidents and one complaint involving children in the custody of the Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). Utilizing safety science, the reviews demonstrated that while there is still much work to be done, New Hampshire is on the right path to strengthening its care of children who enter the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

The four cases, all reviewed in the OCA's 2020 reporting year, included incidents involving a near death injury, a disrupted relative foster placement, an 80-minute prone-positioned restraint, and a suicide attempt. "In this report and the process that produced it," said Moira O'Neill, the State Child Advocate, "we seek to honor the children's adverse experiences by learning and contributing to a system of prevention. The personal tragedy of critical incidents and the experiences of staff working with those children can be lost in bureaucratic detachment, blame and shame of state actors, family dysfunction, and politics. It is up to the child welfare system to soothe family loss, demonstrate accountable standards of practice, deal with political fallout, and cope with the close proximity of tragedy. Our safety-science driven system learning reviews (SLRs) seek to empower the people who do the work every day to examine events and identify opportunities for system strengthening."

Prevailing themes identified in the reviews included a need for pro-active communication supported by better-established relationships between states, states with providers, states with foster and biological parents, and all parties with children. Committed relationships were identified as key in nurturing child wellbeing among families and as an incentive for successful child engagement in treatment.

The findings of the reviews confirmed the value of New Hampshire's path towards a broadened system of mental health care and community supports created by 2019 legislation and budget allocations, in particular Senate Bill 14. The review teams identified a gap in assessment and treatment for behavioral conditions associated with developmental disabilities and communication conditions. The findings also confirmed the work of DCYF in its rollout of community-based services and its redesign of residential services.

Pursuant to NH RSA chapter 21-V, the Office of the Child Advocate provides independent oversight to ensure that children involved with a state agency, and in particular, children served by the child welfare or juvenile justice systems, receive timely, safe, and effective services and that their best interests are being protected.

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