



# State of New Hampshire

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Office of the Child Advocate



Moira O'Neill  
Director

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**Concord: Child Advocate declines to seek second term.**

Moira O'Neill announced today that she informed the governor and Oversight Commission on Children's Services that she will not seek a second four-year term as the State Child Advocate. O'Neill's term will end on January 30, 2022.

Dr. O'Neill was appointed the first Child Advocate to the Office of the Child Advocate in 2018. Creation of the independent oversight office was part of wide reforms undertaken in response to troublesome practices and the deaths of children known to the Division for Children, Youth and Families. O'Neill brought a unique degree of expertise and experience to the roll. She previously served as an Assistant Child Advocate in Connecticut for eleven years and conducted doctoral research on the topic of State Child Advocates at Yale University. "This opportunity was the capstone of a career and scholarship," O'Neill stated, "I am grateful for the governor's appointment and the steady support of the Oversight Commission on Children's Services. It is an honor to put one's expertise at the disposal of children's interests."

Under O'Neill's leadership, the Office established a pioneering evidence-based process for reviewing critical incidents like child deaths. It is grounded in safety science, an evaluative science used in safety critical industries such as aviation and nuclear power. "We found little evidence of progress or improved child outcomes in the traditional sensational, blaming approach to oversight," O'Neill said. "Safety Science relies upon an investment in relationships and making safe space for examining the many layers of influences on decision making." The uniquely collaborative approach is now a model for independent oversight agencies across the country. The Office is in its fourth year of significant funding from Casey Family Programs to support the review work.

O'Neill refined and expanded the governing statute, RSA 21-V, first by opening the Office's services to all citizens concerned about children's care. In the original iteration of the statute, only legislators, the governor and the Oversight Commission could make complaints. Later she advocated to strengthen the independence of the Office to assure trust with the community and freedom from undue influence. The Office now has expanded jurisdiction over all children's services beyond DCYF. The expansion, O'Neill wrote to the governor, allows that, "children may benefit long before they are abused, neglected or adjudicated delinquent."

Pursuant to RSA 21-V:10, III(a) the Oversight Commission on Children's Services shall recommend three qualified candidates to the governor, in rank order, for appointment to the position of Child Advocate.

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