



State of Florida
Department of Children and Families

Rick Scott
Governor

Esther Jacobo
Interim Secretary

December 19, 2013

The Honorable Perry Thurston, Leader
Florida House Democratic Caucus
331 Northwest 27th Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33311-8632

Dear Leader Thurston:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and recent tragic child deaths. We, in partnership with the Governor's office, have been working tirelessly to address gaps in our processes, increase resources and improve services to vulnerable children and families across the state. I can assure you that we will not be proposing any budget cuts to child welfare. On the contrary, we are working closely with the Governor's Office and the Legislature to prioritize funding for child protection services.

As we have learned from national experts in the field of child welfare, we must never stop trying to improve. I would point out that just two years ago, the department and Governor Scott championed a bill that provided salary increases and a career path for all child protective investigators and reformed DCF on many levels. The practice of child welfare is ever-changing and, as new and better ways to conduct investigations and reach at-risk families are developed, we will be nimble in implementing practices to better serve vulnerable Floridians.

We engaged Casey Family Programs, in part, to help us ensure that we make strategic investments to improve our processes, target children who are most at-risk and address the gaps in our current system. As we formulate our budget proposals, it is critically important to me and the Governor that we provide the Legislature with concrete proposals that specifically target children who are most at-risk.

In addition to funding, we are already addressing many of the findings in the Casey report. These initiatives have all been presented to your colleagues on the House Healthy Families Committee, but I have provided some information below for your reference.

- **Safety plan template:** More than 1,000 child welfare workers have been trained by Casey on safety planning and provided a new template. As of November 10, investigations will not be closed with open safety plans unless transferred to case management for monitoring. If we learn of a lack of compliance, we will take action. Investigative safety plan must be reviewed within 24 hours by a supervisor and all safety plans must be uploaded to FSFN.

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- **Paired CPI Pilots:** DCF has implemented paired CPI pilots. These initiatives deploy two Child Protective Investigators on cases involving children aged 0-3 in families with key risk factors.
- **Safety Decision-making Methodology:** DCF is implementing a new Safety Methodology that will improve the type and amount of information our Child Protective Investigators gather to make decisions about a child's safety to inform a full family assessment.
- **Gap analysis:** DCF is working with Community-Based Care lead agencies to conduct a comprehensive analysis of community resources with special attention to services for children with disabilities, substance abuse, mental health issues and domestic violence.
- **ChildStat Training and Facilitation:** DCF leadership participated in ChildStat training on October 23. ChildStat focuses management's attention on the quality of practice through a disciplined review of both performance data and real-time cases in progress. Our goal is to incorporate elements of this practice across all of the regions.
- **Rapid Safety Feedback:** In a Suncoast Region pilot, staff are implementing a "Rapid Safety Feedback" program, which is a real time approach to preventive Quality Assurance for child safety. Identified cases are subjected to a nine-question review and those with a safety concern are quickly staffed.
- **Safe Sleep Campaign:** DCF launched a safe sleep initiative with community partners and law enforcement on September 25. The campaign focuses on training first responders on how to talk to families who are not practicing safe sleep, educating them and providing pack-n-plays, when needed. According the Casey report, this is the leading cause of child death.

These are just a few of the key initiatives DCF has undertaken to improve our processes and address child safety. Child safety is our shared responsibility, and I welcome the opportunity to work with you and our other partners in the Legislature in improving our child welfare system and keeping Florida's children safe.

If I may be of further assistance, please let me know.

Sincerely,



Esther Jacobo
Interim Secretary