



# News Release



Clark County Family Services  
Christine Skorupski  
Public Information Officer  
Phone: (702) 455-4019  
Cell: (702) 591-0102

NV Health & Human Services  
Steve George  
Public Information Officer  
Phone: (775) 684-4024  
[sageorge@dhhs.nv.gov](mailto:sageorge@dhhs.nv.gov)

**For Immediate Release**

**Thursday, Feb. 22, 2007**

## **Clark County Completes Re-Review, Finds Every Child Accounted for & Safe**

The Clark County Department of Family Services (DFS) has completed its re-review of 55 child welfare cases identified in an eight-page document detailing possible child safety issues, finding that every child is accounted for and safe.

The re-review consisted of a thorough examination of the current safety of the children involved in these cases, and a report detailing the current status of the concerns identified in each of the case vignettes has been provided to the County Commission and the state Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

In early February, County Commission Chairman Rory Reid and DHHS Director Mike Willden asked staff to conduct the re-review to assure the community that the children mentioned in the document are having all their needs met.

"While I'm relieved to find that we have confirmed the safety of every single one of the children involved in these cases, I believe this further emphasizes the need for resources and reform in our child welfare system," Reid said. "We have been taking a critical look at our policies and practices, including a recent and on-going review of investigations that has shown an alarming number of reports that do not have documented responses. That's clearly something we cannot tolerate and must be remedied."

An internal Family Services department review of its records has found that an estimated 45 percent of overdue investigations lack documentation showing that alleged perpetrators and victims were interviewed. Cases considered "overdue" are those that have been open beyond 45 days. Officials suspect that contacts were made in many cases but that they were not documented. However, DFS is verifying this in each identified case.

"These findings are very disturbing," Reid said. "I've been informed that staff are reviewing every single one of the cases and following up to ensure that children are safe and that unanswered questions are addressed and documented."

-more-

Willden said, "In the interest of accessibility and transparency, we are making the report available on our Division of Child and Family Services website ([www.dcfs.state.nv.us](http://www.dcfs.state.nv.us), click on "Clark County Department of Family Services Review"). We want the public to know that the state and county are working to ensure the safety of children under the care of DFS, and that accountability and responsibility must be a major component of all policies."

In spring 2006, the county commissioned independent consultant Ed Cotton to review and assess 1,352 open child abuse and neglect cases involving at least one child under the age of 6. State and county officials were concerned that the DFS had no internal protocols or processes for conducting comprehensive administrative reviews of child welfare cases. State and county management recognized that an internal case review process is an essential part of a well-functioning child welfare system and hired Cotton to conduct the review to include both intact family and out-of-home placement cases.

At the conclusion of the review, Cotton was asked to compile his findings in a report to be released to the public and used by the department as a tool for reform. Included in a preliminary draft of Cotton's report was an eight-page addendum that contained 55 cases where the safety of a child under protection may have been jeopardized. Citing potential confidentiality concerns, Cotton decided to remove those pages before the final version of the report was issued in December.

After evaluating the findings in Cotton's report, which cited three main areas of concern – child safety, caseworker visits, and case planning – county DFS Director Tom Morton called for an internal review of all open cases in which the child had not been seen in more than 60 days. Internal reviews have been on-going and show a marked improvement in the number of open cases in which the child had been seen in the last 60 days. Cotton's review found that 23 percent of the cases reviewed had children who had not been seen in more than 60 days. An internal review of all open cases found that 2.9 percent of children in DFS custody had not been seen in more than 60 days. All of these children were visited by a caseworker by the end of December 2006.

Additionally, the DFS has asked an independent team of experts to examine a sampling of the 105 cases categorized by Cotton and his team as "unclear, action needed," in order to provide a status update and insight into the department's progress towards reform.

Cotton's report also brought forth concerns about the thoroughness of investigations, and as a result, Cotton was asked to conduct a separate review of child abuse and neglect investigations. The second case review involved a small, county-selected and non-random sample of 148 closed investigations conducted by Family Services' seven investigative units.

In response to Cotton's findings from his review of closed investigations, the DFS is conducting an internal review of open investigations, particularly those that have been open for more than 45 days. An independent review team is also addressing the timeliness of interviews with alleged perpetrators and victims and the thoroughness of investigations.

One area that officials are focusing on is the need for staff training. Governor Jim Gibbons announced Feb. 8 that he is sending a plan to the Legislature that will provide nearly \$2.6 million in much-needed child welfare training dollars to the state DHHS. An annual budget of \$2.6 million is needed to fully operate the training program. Under Title IV-E, the federal

government provides a 75-percent match to state dollars allocated to child welfare training, meaning the state needed to appropriate the remaining 25 percent, which in the 2008-09 biennium amounts to \$649,529 per fiscal year.

Gibbons sent a request to the Legislature to use \$1.3 million in Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) reserve funds. Under federal TANF block grant rules, up to 10 percent of the grant amount may be transferred to the Title XX Block Grant account, with that account available to fund various social services. Under the governor's plan, the \$1.3 million would then be transmitted to the County Integration Budget, resulting in the money being available as general fund dollars that would be allocated to DHHS to fund the training program.

The training money would fund two programs:

- Nevada Training Academy program is the result of a partnership between the state and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and the University of Nevada, Reno. It provides seven weeks of pre-service training to new workers in all three major child welfare agencies in Nevada, including Clark County Family Services. The program includes four weeks of classroom training, on-the-job training exercises, structured coaching and intensive supervision.
- The Program Improvement Plan (PIP) adopted in 2006 is a 15-day training program for existing child welfare workers that includes conducting risk assessment, using data in supervision, documentation protocols, and collaborative case management, among other courses.

In September 2006, Morton launched "Safe Futures," a multifaceted, phased plan that addresses many of the deficiencies of the county's child welfare system. It calls for more than \$30 million in local, state and federal funding and at least 150 positions needed to reform the child welfare system in Clark County and bring it to proportionate levels with population growth and national standards. The County Commission has declared child welfare its top priority and has allocated much-needed resources, including 119 new positions for the department, as well as two permanent attorney positions and one legal office assistant assigned to the Special Public Defender's Office.

###