



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

NEWS RELEASE

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RELEASE: July 31, 1997



GOV. WHITMAN SIGNS COMPREHENSIVE LEGISLATION TO BOLSTER DIVISION OF YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES

Gov. Christie Whitman today signed legislation that implements her administration's comprehensive plan to strengthen the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) and protect New Jersey's children from abuse and neglect.

"Children are our greatest treasure in New Jersey, which is why I am committed to providing strong laws, strong staff, and strong tools to the agency which is charged with protecting them," said Gov. Whitman. "The steps we are taking today will allow for comprehensive reform of DYFS procedures and state intervention in child abuse to allow for increased protection of our children -- who deserve nothing less."

"The legislation that I am signing today eases confidentiality laws to provide the public with more information about child abuse cases handled by DYFS," said Gov. Whitman. "This new law will also allow the state to quickly terminate parental rights in cases where a parent is responsible for the death of a child -- protecting the lives of the rest of the children in that family."

This new law includes the following provisions:

- Permits the division to release information to the public regarding cases of child abuse or neglect resulting in a child fatality or near fatality and specify additional entities to which DYFS is authorized to disclose case information.

- Allows for the termination of parental rights in cases where a parent is responsible for the murder, aggravated manslaughter or manslaughter of their child.

- Creates a Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board to review all suspicious child deaths or critical incidents for any child in New Jersey, not just children involved in DYFS investigations.

- Establishes citizen review panels to examine policies and procedures of local and state agencies.

- Allows for state intervention in cases of medical neglect, including the withholding of treatment of disabled infants with life-threatening conditions.

- Clearly defines sexual abuse, including specific actions which constitute such abuse.

The legislation, S-2209, was sponsored by Senate President Donald DiFrancesco (R-Middlesex/Morris/Somerset/Union), Senator Peter Inverso (R-Mercer/Middlesex) and Assembly Members Rose Heck (R-Bergen) and Guy Talarico (R-Bergen).

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