

the agency's practices.

Over the years, court records show, the agency has defied judicial orders to make case files available to families.

Family members say that the agency has repeatedly refused to provide parents of the simplest details of their children's stays in foster care. And the agency's records make clear that it has occasionally violated the mandated requirement that it make public its performance records in certain cases.

Some officials of the Division of Youth and Family Services argue that many of their efforts to keep records secret result from their desire to protect the privacy of the children who have spent time in their care. In fact, they say, state law often expressly forbids them to make many details public.

But others — child welfare experts, lawyers who have fought the state for years and many families — say the agency's culture of secrecy has been an heartfelt a cynical attempt to hide horrors and limit its legal exposure.

"The confidentiality laws were written with good intentions, but they prevent the division from being accountable," said Mary Coogan, a lawyer and the assistant director of the Association for the Children of New Jersey, an advocacy group based in Newark. "It has a negative effect. While not necessarily malicious, it allows inappropriate actions to go unquestioned."

It is not hard to find examples of families who say they have been treated, even betrayed, by what they regard as the agency's adamant and sometimes illegal insistence on keeping records secret.

In one instance, after a judge ordered a young girl returned to her father after six years in foster care, the father and daughter continued to be denied access to fundamental information like medical and school records.

Another family fought for four years to hold the agency accountable for the injuries of their 22-month-old granddaughter, who was severely scalded in foster care. Despite repeated court orders, the division never released the complete file.

Many state child welfare agencies are guilty of stretching state confidentiality laws so that they hide institutional defects, said Mark Haskin, a lawyer with the Children's Welfare League of the American Bar Association. In fact, he said, the agency of the state is "questioned." He defies laws orders, the girl's spiraling

Federal law demands a public accounting of deaths or near fatalities of children in the state's care. But Mr. Delmar said that since 1998 the agency has not prepared about 60 reports on child fatalities. He said the Division and the state attorney general's office were working together to bring the agency into compliance.

Mr. Delmar attributed the lapses to a high turnover rate among those who prepared the reports and wide misunderstandings about what information must be included in the reports.

Children's advocates in New Jersey say there are other ways the state undermines the ability of families and children to get information.

In New Jersey, nearly 50 percent of children have been placed in foster care voluntarily by their parents. According to an agency spokesman, that number may be high because it includes children of parents who initiated court action to get them back.

Parents who voluntarily relinquish their children are not entitled to a lawyer, nor are their children. In addition, under such circumstances, the agency is required only to review the case annually. But if parents challenge division custody claims, they are entitled to court review, which may occur more frequently.

A Traumatized Child At age 22 months, R. W. (her lawyer requested confidentiality), scarred across large sections of her body, spent 49 days in the hospital recovering from burns she had suffered as a result of her mother's negligence. Her grandparents said they thought the state's welfare agency had to be held accountable and perhaps compensated for their permanently disfigured granddaughter.

So they went to court, and the judge agreed that the agency was liable for itself. Still, it took four years for the agency, despite repeated orders from the judge, to produce the child's case file. And then it never produced all of the information, asserting that it could not find some of the material.

The fury felt by the grandparents was hardly isolated. Lawyers who sued the division on behalf of children maimed or injured in its care say that it is a nearly impossible task to gain information, chiefly because the agency refuses to produce the case histories necessary to build a liability case.

Sometimes, the lawyers say, the agency argues that confidentiality laws cover almost any document requested. At times, it simply defies judicial orders to turn over the material. Or it delays doing so long that families exhaust their financial resources and give up.

"At every turn it's a battle," said Samuel A. Denburg, a lawyer in Fair Lawn, N.J., who has represented a handful of clients in lawsuits against the child welfare agency. "You have to file motion after motion with the court. Nothing is voluntarily released."

In June 1995, R. W. was first placed with a foster mother. There were numerous reasons that the division should not have put her in this home, records show, including the fact that the agency had approved the home for children older than 3. Two months later, the child suffered a black eye. Although it found the injury suspicious, the agency left the child in the home.

On Nov. 3, 1995, R. W. was brought to the hospital with severe burns that had occurred four or five days earlier. According to hospital files, the foster mother claimed she had left R. W. alone in the kitchen strapped in a high chair, and a kettle on the gas range sprayed steam and boiling water on her. According to records, a doctor said she had "serious doubts" about that explanation.

The child spent nearly two months in the hospital and was left with large scars across her arms and legs and smaller scars on her torso.

Upon release from the hospital, R. W. went to live with her maternal grandparents. The agency quickly sent the grandparents a letter warning them that talking about their child's experience publicly would violate New Jersey law.

In the suit, Mr. Kwiatkowski accuses the agency of, among other things, taking custody of his daughter without a hearing and improperly placing her in a mental hospital.

Mr. Delmar, the state spokesman, would not comment on the Kwiatkowski case, citing state confidentiality laws and the pending litigation.

Mr. Kwiatkowski conceded that the turbulence of a divorce from his wife might have proved volatile for his daughter. "I'm not perfect," he said.

The agency initially took custody of Mr. Kwiatkowski's daughter in 1995, when she was 8, court records show. Those familiar with the girl's file said that it contained several allegations of abuse and neglect against her parents. Among the

BDC 10.3ow. aughwas 8,pa'm 1 l a6-1.1285mmeb 5.61

Some foster parents left their children dangerously unsupervised. One left an 18-month-old toddler with medication and emotional problems in the care of an 8-year-old child. Sick and disabled children were regularly left alone with belt buckles and kicked.

We believe that most foster parents are caring and that many DYFS workers struggle to carry out the agency's mission of rescuing and protecting children. But DYFS can stop pretending it only needs to deal with a few bad drops in an otherwise tranquil sea of social work.

Most of these horrors could not have happened if caseworkers had made the visits and assessments they were supposed to make. Not unless they made them intent on not seeing, hearing or doing anything to upset foster placements, not unless their supervisors consistently ignored their reports.

DYFS is woefully short of good foster homes. Yet a church group that had recruited 200 new foster homes for nearly 300 DYFS kids was told in October that it should stop working. DYFS's current reform administration has found nothing wrong with the church group and much to imitate in its program for DYFS to emulate.

We do not know why DYFS would reject a group that succeeded where other people had failed. All we know is that DYFS can use all the help it can get.

The most recent flurry of DYFS reform was sparked when the body of a Faheem Williams, was discovered in a filthy basement where his two brothers were found locked up, abused and near starvation. DYFS had warned that the children were in danger, yet the agency shoved the family's file into the closed-case drawer.

It is frightening to realize that the Williams case and other tragedies we have learned of since happened in the midst of what was supposed to be a DYFS reform movement. Under pressure of a suit brought four years ago by Children's Rights, a national advocacy group, the state claimed it was doing caseworkers, creating specialized foster care homes and reshaping the agency. DYFS begged for the right to continue making progress, frustrated by lawsuits and lawyers.

Yet while that progress was said to be happening, Faheem Williams and other children perished or suffered abuse to rival anything delivered in the homes from which they were removed.

Under the McGreevey administration, the state has finally come to its senses and stopped fighting the Children's Rights suit. The state is in mediation, working toward a settlement based on agency reform. Good.

Although the suit was about foster care, the settlement must address DYFS more broadly. It cannot be a mere stipulation to set up bureaucratic

families it deals with. We need more drug rehabilitation and counseling specifically directed towards parents with young children.

You cannot do all that on \$20 million. The DYFS reformers are loathe to admit that fact because the state is facing a huge budget deficit. But the deficit and our inability to fund the state's necessary work are not artifacts of a cool economy. They are the long-lived legacy of Whitman tax cuts and the tax phobia that prevents this state from seeking new ways to get the revenue it desperately needs.

Enacting a minimal tax increase on our wealthiest residents would make sense and would make it easier to do right by our most vulnerable citizens, such as the kids who need DYFS protection.

New boss finds DYFS 'appalling'

Thursday, May 08, 2003

Overhaul of child welfare agency to include civil service challenge

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO
Star-Ledger Staff

The new boss in charge of repairing the state's fractured child welfare system says she is appalled by its lack of accountability and admits the problems go much deeper than she had imagined.

"I find the situation far sadder than I anticipated it would be," Deputy Human Services Commissioner Colleen Maguire

"I think it's very difficult to conduct a thorough and independent investigation if you are still connected to the agency responsible for placing the children," she said.

5:3) 17-MAY-2003 12:43 [Diane Falk \(falkd\)](#)



ha 2ay

Posted on Wed, May. 14, 2003

A safety net that failed N.J. sisters

By Kristen A. Graham, Sam Wood and Troy Graham

project. They approved of the handshake and a verbal commitment" to use Lipman Hall, when appropriate," he said.

The RFP process took many months, and DYFS needed to act at once," Venti

"You could sit on your rear end and do nothing. You could say, 'This is not our responsibility because they have psychiatric or juvenile justice problems and should be locked up.'

"Or, you could do what we did and try to normalize them and treat," he said. "Because eventually they will leave the system, and you will find them dead, homeless or in prison."

Venti retired from DYFS last summer. Soon thereafter he went to work for Clancy, on what he called "a little short-term" research project." The topic was adult corrections.

On Jan. 18, 2001, Robert Sabreen, a regional DYFS chief in Newark under Venti's supervision, signed a \$12.5 million contract, for up to 200 children, with Clancy's Roseland-based nonprofit agency, Educational Health Centers of America. He also runs the for-profit Community Education Centers of America Inc., which offer alternatives to the punitive corrections system.

Clancy planned on a July 1 opening for Lipman Hall.

But a new commissioner of Human Services, Jim Smith, applied brakes to the project after taking an inventory of the department's contracts.

The Clancy contract "did not appear to have the standard inclusion of staffing qualifications (or) curriculum," recalled Smith, now director of the department's Division of Developmental Disabilities.

It was also inconsistent "with the direction we were taking in residential services," Smith said. And it was not clear, he said, where the money would come to pay for it.

Smith renegotiated the contract.

His predecessor, Michele Guhl, has since said she had no inkling of a contract with Clancy.

"I never authorized (signing a contract)," Guhl, now executive director of the New Jersey Association of Health Plans, a trade group for HMOs, said in an interview last month.

Guhl's former assistant, Maddy Keogh, said she, however, was directly involved. "I probably should have said something, but I had 900 contracts, 2,700 employees, 52,000 kids. It wasn't done to keep anything from anybody," she said.

While Smith renegotiated the contract, Lipman Hall was put on hold by Clancy, who had sunk millions of dollars into renovations at the warehouse, was losing money.

He went to the governor's office to complain. Specifically, he went to see the chief of management and policy, and first cousin of Nick Scalera, his consultant.

Ciro Scalera met with Clancy. But, he said recently, "I informed my superiors that I couldn't be involved in any matters related to Lipman Hall. Then I assigned my deputy to it. I never took a meeting with Clancy, or my cousin, or anyone related to Lipman Hall. The only other thing I know is that it was ultimately resolved." Scalera, a former director of the Association for Children of New Jersey, is now a Verizon executive.

When Lipman Hall opened, Clancy's administrators handed out program grants to seven individuals "for their support and assistance in making Lipman Hall a reality."

They were: DiFrancesco, Human Services Commissioner Jim Smith, DYFS Director Venti, Mayor James, State Sen. Richard Codey (D-Essex), State Sen. Joseph M. Kyrillos Jr. (R-Monmouth) and Scalera.

A few days later on Nov. 1, 2001, Venti signed the new Clancy contract for \$8.8 million, covering eight months, and limited the number of children to 80.

Smith managed to find a way to pay for Lipman Hall funds through Children's System of Care Initiative, a \$137 million community-based network of children's mental health services that had been launched that year.

That stunned Kathy Wright, a founding member of the Child Initiative.

Tapping that money for Lipman Hall goes "against the fundamental philosophy" of the program, she said. The Children's Initiative was designed to treat mentally ill children on an out-patient basis and keep them at home whenever possible, according to Wright.

New Jersey's state auditor, Richard L. Fair, was critical of the contract for another reason.

Under its terms, Lipman Hall was held to 80 beds, at a rate of \$850,000. Clancy would receive a set monthly payment of \$847,000, whether all 80 were occupied or not.

Thus, although there were only 28 boys at Lipman Hall in December 2001, the state still cut a check for \$847,000. Four months later, there were 65.

Fair recommended that the department "seek reimbursement for the payments," which amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The state is evaluating the contract and how the money was spent before deciding whether to seek repayment, Delmar says.

Clancy's spokesman, William Palatucci, a lawyer, lobbyist, Republican Party strategist, said the arrangement was nothing unusual.

"This helps needed projects like Lipman Hall get off the ground and makes budgeting easier for any department," he said.

In January 2003, DYFS renewed Clancy's contract.

Now he gets paid only for beds that are filled.

WHAT WORKS

Today there are 110 boys at Lipman Hall. Caring for them costs \$395 per child, a rate comparable to other treatment centers for severely disturbed youths.

"Verbal de-escalation," as opposed to physical restraints and discipline in the behavior management room, has become the main tool for managing boys' behavior. Good behavior is rewarded with points; the more points a boy accumulates, the more privileges he receives.

Lipman Hall's original director, a woman recruited from the Department of Corrections, is gone.

Clancy replaced her with Nick Scalera, who hired Pat Byrne, a DYFS chief of staff.

On April 28, 2003, Gary Sefchik -- last year's whistle-blower -- notified Scalera that there were no outstanding violations and the facility was fully in compliance.

Scalera and his staff say the program is succeeding.

"We know what works, and we have very, very high standards," said ~~Dr. Lee~~ ~~Wood~~, a psychologist who is director of clinical programs for Community Education and Health Centers.

Deputy Human Services Commissioner Colleen Maguire said she ~~kept~~ ~~a~~ sharp eye on Lipman Hall. She was appointed to oversee DYFS ~~in~~ ~~February~~.

"It's a viable functioning program now," she said.

Its size and hard-to-treat population make it a particularly ~~challenging~~ ~~institution~~, Maguire said, "But we have to make sure all those ~~challenges~~ are attended to."

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

"We face a season of great reckoning in New Jersey," the governor says. "The revelations about DYFS have shaken us deeply, and brought to public attention dark secrets of a world most of New Jersey has known for too long."

The panel's job also will entail coordinating the efforts of different governmental offices and community agencies to identify children at risk of abuse.

"One of the central lessons of Faheem's death is that government is fragmented," McGreevey's speech says, noting the courts, the welfare system and the school system should have recognized the Williams family's troubles and shared that information with DYFS.

Other highlights of the speech include:

A pledge to support a controversial DYFS proposal to dismantle civil service rules so the agency can recruit experienced social workers from outside DYFS and pay them more competitively. "Reforming civil service practices will not be easy," McGreevey's speech says. "It will require approval of the Legislature and there will be entrenched interests who will oppose it. But job security and promotion opportunities can't be the one focus of an agency dedicated to child protection."

A promise to back legislation that would require criminal background checks for people who work at privately run group homes and residential treatment centers.

McGreevey's promise to sign a bill that would provide free college to children who are leaving foster care. The bill passed the Assembly Thursday.

A directive to Human Services Commissioner Gwendolyn L. Harris and Senior Services Commissioner Clifton R. Lacy to identify by the fall more drug treatment programs for addicted parents involved with DYFS.

Association for Children of New Jersey Executive Director Cecilia Zalkind, who will join the "Governor's Cabinet for Children," said a broad base of leadership must address these critical issues. "The Department (of Services) and DYFS cannot do this alone."

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

Governor's choice 18

Monday, May 19, 2003

Gov. James E. McGreevey today will appoint a "Governor's Cabinet for Children," an ad hoc panel of experts that will guide the reform efforts of the Division of Youth and Family Services. Its 18 members are:

Human Services Commissioner Gwendolyn L. Harris -- chairwoman

budget for other changes at the child welfare agency. "The governor is irrevocably committed to greater accountability," Mr. Rasmussen said.

The University of Maryland study examined 129 cases handled by the investigations unit from 1999 to 2002. A nine-member research team at the social work school and the Institute for Human Services Policy reviewed the case files, which involved 195 children from both rural and urban settings around New Jersey.

The researchers said they had used a random sampling method that reduced errors and made it likely that their findings would represent the same results if they had examined every investigation by the unit during the four-year period that they reviewed.

The 42-page study dissects the agency's investigation unit, commonly known by its initials, I.A.I.U. That unit performs what is widely regarded to be the most critical work in child protection: quickly and accurately assessing complaints of abuse and levels of risk.

The Maryland researchers found a pattern of often shoddy, incomplete investigations, in which officials failed to interview crucial witnesses or to thoroughly check the personal histories of those accused of abuse and neglect. Nearly a quarter of those foster parents whom the agency checked on turned out to have prior allegations of abuse and neglect, and roughly half of those allegations had been substantiated, and yet those parents were often allowed to keep the children in their homes.

"I.A.I.U. was routinely noted to conduct overly legalistic and narrow investigations, frequently failing to collect, integrate and critically analyze the available information with anything approaching reasonable professional judgment," wrote the researchers, who were led by Diane Panfilis.

Even when presented with what seemed to be clear-cut examples of abuse, often fell short, researchers found. In one case, the they found an allegation of abuse was unsubstantiated even though a foster mother with two previous substantiated allegations of abuse had admitted to investigators that she had struck a child with a belt, leaving a four-inch mark on the child's face.

In more than a handful of instances, the researchers discovered there was no indication that an investigation of any kind had been done after allegations of abuse or neglect were received.

"Based on the results of this review," the report said, "immediate action must be taken to protect these children."

Copyright 2003 The New York Times Company

May 23, 2003

Report Blasts N.J. Child Welfare Agency

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Filed at 4:22 a.m. ET

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) -- New Jersey's child welfare agency routinely puts children at risk by placing them with abusive foster parents and botching investigations, according to a study by a children's advocacy group.

A review by the New York-based Children's Rights Inc. found that the welfare agency's investigations unit between 1999 and 2002 was constantly delayed, incomplete and inconclusive despite clear signs of abuse.

"It is now a documented fact that no child is safe today in New Jersey care," said Marcia Robinson Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights.

A separate report released Thursday by a state-appointed panel criticized the Division of Youth and Family

Services, saying it must increase its staff, provide more services and increase accountability to deep-seated problems that prevent the agency from protecting children."

That report said the state should spend more than \$187 million over the next three years to hire 1,027 additional workers to meet national

and practice that I have no doubt will result in better life outcomes for the most vulnerable children and families in our State," said William Waldman, former Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Human Services. "These changes will infuse accountability throughout the system, create a more client-focused focus on the needs of children and families and serve to unify our efforts in this regard. The safety and permanency of children and the preservation of families is everybody's business. And, the Governor is clearly doing his part."

GOVERNOR MCGREEVEY'S DYFS REFORM PROPOSALS

1. Accountability by Management

The Administration is moving to a system that judges the performance of each DYFS district office and manager by the only measure that counts: the outcomes for children. We will reward good managers and hold all managers responsible for the actions of the workers under their charge. We will publish an annual public report card for each of the District Offices within DYFS according to federal standards for child well-being. A transparent agency is essential to create the accountability that is much needed throughout DYFS.

2. Hiring Experienced Workers and Supervisors

The administration is moving ahead with bold reforms that will give DYFS the staff it needs to keep children safe. Current law and regulations make it difficult for DYFS to hire experienced workers in any position other than entry-level trainee slots. The vast majority of DYFS caseworkers have less than 5 years experience. We will recruit experienced social workers into supervisory and managerial positions as we begin a new wave of hiring. The administration will advance bold changes in personnel policies to open the agency to experienced, talented social workers.

3. The Governor's Cabinet for Children

Lasting reform will require action and coordination from the very top of government. On Monday, May 19, 2003, Governor McGreevey established - by executive order - the Governor's Cabinet for Children, which brings together

offices from the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Senior Services, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the Department of Transportation and the Department of the Treasury.

The Governor's Cabinet for Children will be chaired by Human Services Commissioner Gwendolyn Harris and include

- Reverend Darell Armstrong, Shiloh Baptist Church, Trenton
- Howard Beyer, Executive Director of the Juvenile Justice Commission
- Tom Blatner, President of Janus Solutions
- Lisa Eisenbud, Deputy Chief of Management and Operations, Office of the Governor
- Senator Jack Fay
- Peter Harvey, Esq., Acting Attorney General
- Dr. Clifton Lacy, DHSS Commissioner
- Susan Bass Levin, DCA Commissioner
- William Librera, DOE Commissioner
- Colleen Maguire, Special Deputy Commissioner of Children's Services at the Dept. of Human Services
- John McCormac, State Treasurer
- Judge Alex Menza
- Captain Ralph Rivera, NJ State Police
- Richard Roper, Rockefeller Institute and Roper Group
- Kevin Ryan, Esq., Deputy Chief of Management and Operations, Office of the Governor
- Yvonne Seegers, New Jersey Public Defender
- Maria Vizcarrondo-DeSoto President, United Way of Essex and West Hudson
- Cecilia Zalkind, Esq., Executive Director, ACNJ

4. The Child Advocate Bill of 2003

The Administration's Child Advocate Bill creates an independent watchdog in, but not of, the Department of Law and Public Safety to monitor child welfare programs, investigate failures and demand corrective action.

The Advocate will focus on children at risk of abuse and neglect with investigative powers, including subpoena power. The Advocate's mission is to ensure effective, appropriate and timely services for children who may have been abused or neglected or who are in State custody under state supervision.

The Advocate will be an attorney - appointed by the Governor - serving a term of 5 years.

- The Advocate can investigate, monitor or call for corrective action on any single case.
- The Advocate can litigate or institute proceedings in the broad public interest of vulnerable children in the State.
- The Advocate can track the timeliness of investigations by the Dept. of Human Services' Institutional Abuse Unit, giving the public a direct monitor on the agency's performance. Clearly, the Advocate will not fix DYFS in and of itself, but it is a key ingredient to ensure more accountability in a State that investigates child abuse and cares for its victims.

5. SACWIS

We have put the design and construction of Sacwis, (Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System) - a state-of-the-art child tracking computer system - on a fast track for statewide implementation by December 2005. DYFS now relies on one of the nation's oldest and most antiquated child tracking systems. Caseworkers resort to flash cards and post-it notes to recall the status of the 48,000 children they serve. The budget invests \$5.6 million, so New Jersey can join the other 46 states that use SACWIS.

three years."

5:10) 28-MAY-2003 08:59 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

DYFS asking for help to reform Feds begin review of Jersey agency

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO

Star-Ledge Staff

Wednesday, May 28, 2003

State Human Services Commissioner Gwendolyn L. Harris called on federal welfare experts yesterday to help reform the state's child welfare system, which has attracted national attention from a recent spate of child deaths and the disclosure of internal records revealing the system in disarray.

During a meeting in Trenton that formally kicked off a federal review of New Jersey's foster care system, Harris conceded the state is likely to fail in every category the federal Administration for Children Services measures when the study is completed next year.

"With all the awareness generated in the past few months about problems in our child protection system, people like you hopefully are primed to come to the table and help assess our system," Harris told state and federal child welfare officials. "We cannot squander this opportunity."

As a result of its own introspection, DYFS will hold a public meeting Friday in Newark to discuss child abuse and neglect deaths that have occurred over the past five years. There have been 26 deaths of children known to the DYFS system from Essex County alone, and an additional 128 statewide in the same time span.

The event at the Robert Wood Johnson Campus Center at Rutgers University, "State Child Day," will analyze what DYFS and the nonprofit agencies that serve families could have done to prevent these tragedies, Deputy Services Commissioner Colleen Maguire said. Newark will be the first stop on DYFS' community tour that will take Maguire to every county to discuss child abuse deaths and what the state should be doing to intervene before families develop intractable problems.

The public's faith in the child welfare agency has been badly shaken in 2002, when Newark police recovered the body of 7-year-old Faheem Williams, a child who had been under the state's supervision from birth. The DYFS caseworker and her supervisor -- both jugglers with larger-than-average caseloads -- closed the family file without investigating an allegation of physical abuse.

That case, as well as others that have since been made public, exposed deficiencies inside DYFS. Caseworkers supervise too many children, fostering a sense of failure that has led to high turnover. There are few services available, such as drug treatment, in-home counselors and aid to battered women, to help stabilize troubled families. Foster parents are scarce and largely unsupervised. Schools, churches and police departments don't work with DYFS to identify families in trouble.

But with the federal review and a pending class-action lawsuit brought by Children's Rights Inc., a national advocacy group, on behalf of New Jersey's 11,600 foster children, DYFS is under great pressure to change. Proposals abound -- ranging from creating an independent Office of Child Advocate to monitor DYFS, to hiring hundreds of workers and replacing an antiquated computer system, to appointing several panels to study any change.

Monitors from the Administration for Children Services will visit New Jersey in March 2004 to evaluate 50 random DYFS files culled from 2000 to the present, DYFS Assistant Director Donna Younkina said. Half of the files involve children living at home and half will involve children living in foster homes or residential facilities.

In each case, federal monitors will examine how New Jersey compares with the rest of the country in answering the following questions: Were children repeatedly abused or neglected before they were placed? Were children

abused in foster care? Did children shuffle and out of foster care over the course of a year? How many times did child change foster homes? Did it take longer than a year to return a child home, or longer than 24 months to sever parental ties and complete adoption?

Through this review, Harris said, "I truly believe that we are standing the dawn of a new era for New Jersey's child protection system."

No state has passed the federal review, DYFS spokesman Joseph Sacco said. New Jersey is the last state to be evaluated, he said.

The review by the Administration of Children Services, part of the federal Department of Health and Human Services, was scheduled to take place even before the Faheem Williams case brought to light the problems of DYFS. It is required under the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.

The same federal standards that are part of the review will be used by Maguire to judge the performance of DYFS district office managers starting in July. The evaluations will be compiled monthly and condensed into quarterly reports, portions of which will be available to the public, Maguire said. Eventually, each district office manager and other managers will be graded in an annual report card.

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

other managers

Camden, Livingston/New Brunswick and Newark.

Most of the graduates majored in "direct practice," with the largest concentration of study having been on children and families. About 50 of the graduates concentrated on administration, policy and planning, with others majoring in health, mental health and aging.

The average age of the undergraduate completing studies in social work at Rutgers is 26; the average age of the graduate student is 35. The age range of the graduates is 22-62. Most of the graduates are already working and have experience in the human services field. Some work for the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS), others work for private, not-for-profit or for-profit agencies. Many hold administrative or supervisory jobs.

Under Title 4E of the Social Security Act, if a state university has a Master of Social Work program and partners with its state government, it receives a 3 to 1 match in dollars to pay for its state social workers to earn their MSW degrees. This year about 165 have graduated Rutgers an MSW, so many of those in the audience were Commissioner Harris' state employees under the 4E program. Others in the audience spend at least two years working with DYFS.

"It was an historic evening, with me as the first African-American woman dean of the School of Social Work giving this leadership award to the first African-American female Commissioner of the Department of Human Services," said Dean Davidson.

5:13) 04-JUN-2003 08:03 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

June 4, 2003 New York Times
Study Shows More Failings of Child Safety in New Jersey
By RICHARD LEZIN JONES

Dozens of child welfare workers in South Jersey are responsible for the safety of 80 children each, more than three times the accepted national standard. In one case recently a single worker had to oversee the 150 children who had been abused or neglected or were deemed at risk of being harmed.

More than 1,100 children that the state's child welfare agency deemed in danger needed foster care were nonetheless back in the state's care within months. Workers often simply failed to determine whether the parents were able, or even wanted, to care for their children again.

In more than 230 instances in the past two years, the state found abuse had occurred in one of its foster homes or other foster care institutions, but workers neglected for weeks and months to put together a plan to rescue or otherwise protect the children from more abuse.

Those were among the findings in a study released yesterday that detailed the failings of New Jersey's Division of Youth and Family Services. The report, like several before it, was commissioned by Children's Rights Inc., a Manhattan-based advocacy group, as part of a lawsuit against New Jersey over the quality of its foster care system. The state is now discussing a settlement with Children's Rights.

The 80-page report, prepared by Ira Schwartz, the provost of Temple University in Philadelphia and an expert in child welfare issues, uses the state's statistics and the firsthand accounts of state welfare administrators to paint a damning portrait of what Mr. Schwartz concludes is a dysfunctional, mismanaged child welfare system.

The agency, the report found, does not meet any of the six welfare standards set by the Child and Family Service Review, a federal panel that routinely evaluates states on such issues as incidence of abuse and the time required to complete adoptions.

Rates of abuse and neglect among children in the state's custody are three times the level that the federal panel says is cause for serious concern. For children awaiting adoption, the abuse rate is two times that threshold. In one child welfare office in the state, the report said, the abuse rate was 30 times the standard set by the federal panel.

- (a) Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) assesses the realization of outcomes related to safety, permanence, and well-being by children and families as well as the status of systemic factors essential to effective service provision.
- (b) CFSRs evaluate achievement of the following outcomes by children and families:
 - (1) Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
 - (2) Children are maintained in their own homes whenever possible and appropriate.
 - (3) Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
 - (4) The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.
 - (5) Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs.
 - (6) Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
 - (7) Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.
- (c) CFSRs assess functioning of the following systemic factors:
 - (1) Statewide Information System;
 - (2) Case Review System;
 - (3) Staff and Provider Training;
 - (4) Services and Resources;
 - (5) Agency Responsiveness to Community; and
 - (6) Foster and Adoptive Home Approval and Recruitment.
- (d) Additional outcomes and systemic factors may be identified by the administrator of Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the associate director of Office of Field Operations (OFO).
- (e) Each review is conducted by three to four teams. Each team typically focuses on service delivery within one county. A team consists of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) staff who serves as the lead site for review, a Child Welfare (CW) specialist or supervisor not affiliated with a site under review, and a third party identified by the area director. At least one volunteer stakeholder, not employed by DCFS, participates as a member of one of the site reviews.

<http://www.childrensrights.org/policy/web%20winter%202003%20chart%20by%20fotena.pdf>

5:16) 04-JUN-2003 12:07 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

He

health examined recent DYFS data and reports turned over to Children's Rights Initiative as well as transcripts

from the depositions of various DYFS managers taken by plaintiff children's attorneys. Schwartz, the Provost of Temple University and former Dean of the School of Social Work at the University of Pennsylvania, concludes that:

In order to ensure that meaningful reform occurs within DYFS, significant real changes have to occur, some immediately and some only after long-range planning and thoughtful implementation. These changes are essential to repairing this dysfunctional, mismanaged child welfare system. DYFS must implement bold, innovative reforms to bring about meaningful change. If these reforms are not implemented, another tragedy will befall this state, and once again people will clamor for an explanation as to why it happened.

Among the reforms that should take highest priority, according to Schwartz:

Launch an aggressive campaign to finalize the adoption of at least 60% of those children now awaiting adoption. This goal can be accomplished by significantly increasing the amount of money paid to prospective adoptive parents. Funds for this initiative could be generated through a partnership between the state and private entities, including private foundations;

Implement a risk assessment tool using temporary technology that can assist in screening of prospective foster parents;

Ensure that children are not placed in foster homes where one has been convicted of a felony unless approval has been granted by the Director of DYFS after receiving advice from an independent screening committee comprised of professionals and lay persons competent to provide advice;

Never place children in homes where there has been substantiated abuse or neglect;

Implement random on-site monitoring of DYFS placements;

Swiftly investigate and take action on allegations of abuse or neglect of children in foster care;

Reduce the number of children in residential treatment centers without sacrificing quality of services to these children;

Require full and complete assessments of parents before reunification, in order to ensure children are not returned to parents who are unwilling or unable to care for them; and

Provide adequate supports and services for parents who wish to regain custody of their children, but are otherwise unable to do so without these supports and services. A monitoring group should be established, made up of professionals, foster parents and biological parents who have successfully had their children returned home, to review all returns home for the next three years to ensure that decisions to return children home are being carefully made.

"Children in New Jersey are suffering needlessly," stated Marcia Robinson Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights and a lead attorney in the lawsuit. "The expert's thorough and thoughtful evaluation offers specific solutions for this terrible situation, but state officials have never really tried to implement any of them. It's still an open question whether they will do that now, or just paper over the problems once again."

Schwartz notes that Kevin Ryan, Governor McGreevey's Deputy Chief of Operations conceded in a recent newspaper interview that, "The child welfare system in this state has not been a priority. There was a national decision year after year to neglect these children."

An examination of DYFS' own data demonstrates that DYFS has critical deficiencies in numerous areas. For example, Schwartz finds that:

In 2001, the last year for which DYFS data is available, the rate of abuse and neglect for children in DYFS custody was three times the national standard;

The rate of abuse and neglect for children in Adoption Resource Centers ("ARCs"), the entities which oversee children whose plan is to be adopted, is over twelve times the national standard, and for one particular office, the rate is thirty times the national standard;

Children in DYFS custody who are shuffled through multiple placements remain in custody an average of 38.76 months, a staggering amount of time for any child to lack permanency;

Children in DYFS custody who do not achieve permanency in 18 months or less will almost always and often times remain in care for more than four years;

Children ping-pong back and forth between biological families and DYFS custody. In 2002, 67.5% of those children who were returned to DYFS custody after being sent home were returned because their parents were unable to care for them. This

demonstrates that DYFS is either sending children home prematurely, or failing to provide adequate supports to ensure that when children return home they do not have to re-enter care;

More than 63.75% of all children in DYFS custody are shuffled through multiple placements;

Caseloads for DYFS caseworkers are extraordinarily high, with none of the four DYFS regions and only two of the six ARCs meeting recommended national standards. According to DYFS data, in order to meet national caseload standards, DYFS would have to hire approximately 300 additional caseworkers. According to the Staffing Outcome Review Panel ("SORP"), a legislatively-mandated panel created to review issues relating to the management of DYFS, DYFS should in fact hire 1,027 caseworkers, supervisors and aides over the next three years. DYFS' computer system is so antiquated that it utterly fails to track basic information as foster home vacancies, caseworker visits with children, what medical services are required and what services are provided.

"It's an outrage that this system has been so bad for so long with so little done to fix it," said Susan Lambiase, associate director of Children's Rights. "Provost Schwartz uses the state's own data to document a system in a perpetual state of crisis but analyzes it to show how reform could happen. The state could have done that itself years ago if they had not perpetually put foster children at the bottom of the list."

Background

Charlie and Nadine H. v. McGreevey is a federal civil rights lawsuit filed in 1999 in the U.S. District Court for the District of New Jersey by Children's Rights and the New Jersey law firm of Lowenstein, Sandler, charging that the state's child welfare system is poorly managed, overburdened, underfunded and is harming the health and safety of New Jersey's children. The lawsuit is currently pending in the U.S. District Court for the District of New Jersey.

5:18) 07-JUN-2003 14:01 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

Boy's Death Highlights Child Welfare Agency's Problems in

abuse only punishes the spouse who is the victim of the abuse.

The social service agencies that served Daniel's family included Catholic Charities and Children's Home, according to a person with knowledge of the family's case file.

Both agencies declined to talk about any specific cases or events if they had been involved in the Soto home. The Law Guardians, the public defenders who were charged with representing Daniel Soto, said they will issue their own report on the family next week.

While not speaking about the Soto case specifically, Francis E. Donegan, executive director of Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Trenton, said: "There are two competing values: providing security to families and stabilizing and strengthening families. Sometimes they don't always match."

as of yesterday no charges had been filed. An autopsy on the boy is scheduled for this, he said.

Onofri declined to elaborate on anything beyond Wednesday evening. He said the office was keenly aware of DYFS' past and current involvement with the Soto boys, but he could not comment because the prosecutor's investigation was ongoing.

Law enforcement sources said yesterday that Maritza Soto and Sarah were questioned by detectives and that the autopsy results today could cause a significant turn in the probe.

Daniel's trip to a hospital Wednesday night was not his first visit to an emergency room. And in addressing the Soto case yesterday, DYFS officials offered another blunt self-assessment of their own office.

"(DYFS) is a broken agency," said Colleen Maguire, the special deputy commissioner of the Department of Human Services, which oversees DYFS.

"It appears that all of the right things were done in this case and we still had this outcome."

Daniel and Joel Soto were born Sept. 7, 2001.

Just one month later, the boys were brought to Capital Health System hospital in Trenton and doctors found critical head injuries.

Daniel reportedly suffered substantially more injuries than his brother, a DYFS official said the mother had taken "a couple of days" to seek medical treatment for the boys.

The twins and an older sibling were immediately removed from the family and placed in foster care.

Daniel's head injuries were such that DYFS officials feared he might suffer developmental delays. They found foster parents who had training to detect such problems in young children.

As required by law, the birth parents were given psychological evaluations after the children were removed. They also received a host of services and training to help improve their ability as caregivers,

It was Joel that time, DYFS officials said yesterday, and case workers accepted the family's account that the fall was accidental and that Joel had sustained only bruises and scratches.

"There was no evidence of abuse," DYFS spokesman Delmar said in a statement, which occurred in March.

A neighbor, who would only provide the first name Suzana, said she occasionally see Maritza Soto with the kids. "The kids would wave 'Hi' to me. (But) she seemed very rude . . . We never talked."

Neighbor Julia Granda said Soto always walked with her head to the ground and didn't seem friendly. The kids - or the mother - were rarely seen outside playing, she said.

Granda said she saw two ambulances Wednesday evening, and the child being taken out in a stretcher. A news reporter told her about Daniel's death, which elicited a gasp, then tears from the stunned woman.

Staff reporters Eva Loayza and Tracey Regan contributed to this story.

© 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

5:19) 10-JUN-2003 08:15 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

Children's Rights Inc. released another report this morning sharply of DYFS and its care of children in foster care. The press release is headlined, REVIEW OF 500 CASE FILES OF CHILDREN IN DYFS CUSTODY REVEALS "CHAOS AND TRAGEDY". It reports on a review conducted by Richard Gelles, a national expert on child abuse and the Dean of the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work. The text of the release can be found at: <http://www.childrensrights.org/press/2003-06-09.htm>

I am also posting copies of press coverage of the release, including one from today's Star-Ledger.

Too quick an exoneration Newark Star-Ledger Editorial, Tuesday, June 10, 2003

The tragic truth is that the state Division of Youth and Family Services will never be able to save all the children whose families are fractured by drugs, abuse, neglect or any of the other causes that plague children under the agency's care.

However, DYFS does not get the luxury of granting itself early resolution when a child under its supervision dies, as happened with 21-month-old Daniel Soto.

Daniel and his siblings were returned to their parents after having been placed in foster care because of medical neglect and abuse charges. The baby was found with visible injuries, in respiratory arrest in parents' home. Daniel died just before a judge was expected to end the court's supervision of the family and leave it in the hands of DYFS, based on assessments that the family had made great progress.

The investigation is proceeding, the autopsy results are not even in the state Department of Human Services has already said that DYFS did everything it was supposed to do. That may eventually prove true. But the point, how can anyone be sure of what happened?

The declaration is premature and runs counter to the mindset required to reform this troubled agency. DYFS must always ask if there was anything else it could have done, anything it might do better the next time.

Public and internal skepticism is warranted because this agency failed too many of the children in its charge. Its records have not always proven reliable; its assessments have sometimes been damnable.

Just before Daniel Soto died, DYFS confirmed the findings of a study by Children's Rights Inc., an advocacy organization that is suing DYFS and has a court order to examine the agency's files. DYFS failed to follow up on 50 cases of confirmed or alleged abuse in its foster care system. The agency cannot certify the status of those children except to say that none of them has been moved. Not one.

If it took litigation to uncover that information from the agency files, there is good reason for continued concern about all cases, including the Soto case.

A new report from Children's Rights says DYFS is a study in "chaos and tragedy." In 20 percent of cases, children removed from abusive homes ~~sent~~ sent back, only to be removed again because the reunification fails. ~~DYFS~~ DYFS be sure that tragic cycle was not at work in the Soto case.

There are many long-standing problems. Field staffers are juggling an untenably high number of cases, children languishing in foster care while adoption efforts lag and managers have thrown up their hands ~~at a~~ system that betrays the very children it is supposed to rescue.

The McGreevey administration is trying. It is negotiating to settle Children's Rights suit that its predecessors fought. It has asked for patience, saying it has set its reformers to work but cannot ~~solve~~ solve longstanding problems overnight.

However, too many previous administrations have gotten through ~~there~~ there on promises that were never quite kept where DYFS was concerned. Each left its successors -- and thousands of vulnerable children -- ~~holding~~ holding the same bag of trouble. Time is up. Things must change now.

If DYFS is going to change for the better, there can be no rush ~~to~~ to assessing what went wrong in any case -- certainly not in a case ~~where~~ where the result was a dead child.

Foster Care in New Jersey Is Called Inept

June 10, 2003

By LESLIE KAUFMAN and RICHARD LEZIN JONES

In July 2002, a federal judge in southern New Jersey approved ~~to~~ to name an expert to assess the state child welfare agency's handling of 500 ~~randomly~~ randomly selected children in foster care. It did not take the expert long

"We have taken some immediate steps to move abuse investigations, but we need to make more significant changes to truly transform services for children and families," Mr. Delmar said.

While not challenging the accuracy of the report, Mr. Delmar suggested that the expert, the dean of the School of Social Work at the University of Pennsylvania, may be overly critical of long stays in foster care because he disagrees with the extent to which the state tries to reunite children and their parents.

"Dr. Gelles can be quite controversial in his viewpoint," he said. "He is not a supporter of family preservation and prefers to move children more quickly into foster care and into adoption."

Dr. Gelles has long served as an expert on child welfare issues and has previously examined the systems in Florida, the District of Columbia and Hawaii. But he said he was stunned at what he found in New Jersey.

"Child welfare professionals often use the metaphor of children falling between the cracks in the child welfare system," he wrote. "DYFS is an abyss into which children in DYFS's supposed care and custody fall."

The hundreds of case files, with real names and undisputed consequences, deal with many of the now commonly understood failures of the child welfare agency: the shockingly large numbers of children in foster care who have been the subject of reported abuse by foster parents.

Not only does the report confirm earlier findings that nearly one in five children in New Jersey foster care is the subject of an abuse or maltreatment allegation, but it explains, in part, how this could be so.

Dr. Gelles was especially critical of agency officials for knowingly placing some children into homes where at least one person had a known criminal conviction or where the agency itself had found a previous case of child abuse or neglect. "DYFS is playing a most dangerous game of Russian roulette," he wrote.

And a further analysis of abuse findings also showed that caseworkers were either avoiding or circumventing the agency's internal division that is set up to investigate abuse and neglect allegations.

The files, the report found, also showed that the agency failed to provide the most basic sort of health care services to the children in its custody.

The failure to provide any immunizations to nearly half of the children under six years old was "an abomination," Dr. Gelles wrote. In fact, pre-school-age children who had spent less time in the agency's custody, presumably in highly dysfunctional homes, were nevertheless slightly more likely to have been immunized.

And despite the state's own lenient regulations requiring that children in foster care be visited by a caseworker a minimum of once every 60 days, the case files showed that 78 percent of children who were in long-term, out-of-home care had gone at least one span of 90 days or more without contact with their caseworker. National standards set by the Child Welfare League of America suggest that even 30 days is too long a period between visits.

Again it was the children who had been in the agency's care longest appeared to have received the poorest care. Children in care between a year and three years saw their caseworkers every two months, but children longer than that saw their caseworker less than every 90 days on average.

"This," the report found, "forms the cruelest form of institutional neglect and abuse."

Copyright 2003 The New York Times Company

Report finds 10% of kids in foster care mistreated

Tuesday, June 10, 2003

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO

Star-Ledger Staff

The toddler, Daniel Soto, a twin, was pronounced dead hours later. Ms. Soto, 27, was the only adult in the home at the time, the authorities said.

Prosecutors in Mercer County waited to charge her until the medical examiner released the findings of the child's autopsy yesterday. According to those findings, Daniel died of blunt force injuries that caused massive internal bleeding in his heart and lungs.

Ms. Soto surrendered to the authorities at the East Windsor Police Department in western New Jersey shortly after 5 p.m. yesterday and was arraigned about three hours later. She appeared, wearing a green jumpsuit and with her hands shackled, before a municipal court judge, David A. Saltman.

Bail for Ms. Soto, who was transferred to the Mercer County Correctional Center last night, was set at \$500,000. She did not speak at the arraignment, but her lawyer, John W. Hartmann, entered a not guilty plea. He said the family would seek its own autopsy.

New Jersey child welfare officials had removed Daniel; his twin, Joel; and another brother, Carlos, 5, from their home in the fall of 2001 after state investigators found that the twins were abused and neglected by their parents.

Copyright 2003 The New York Times Company

5:22) 12-JUN-2003 13:48 [John Searight \(searigh\)](#)

Below are two very important and interesting articles from today's papers.

Managers Fired at Youth Unit in New Jersey

By RICHARD LEZIN JONES

New York Times

June 12, 2003

TRENTON, June 11 — In the biggest shake-up of New Jersey's welfare agency since the death of a 7-year-old Newark boy in January, the special assistant assigned by the governor to reform the office dismissed 10 of its highest-ranking administrators and managers, officials said.

commissioner of human services, disclosed wholesale personnel changes among more than two dozen officials in the highest ranks of the Division of Youth and Family Services, the child welfare agency.

Ms. Harris said that nearly a third of the division's district office managers and a host of other top officials — including the division's acting director, its head of investigations and one of its top judges — had decided to take early retirement.

"The division is undergoing some unprecedented changes in management," Ms. Harris, who added that the changes give the agency "an excellent opportunity to address accountability."

Ms. Harris's announcement came a day after Gov. James E. McGreevey told reporters — in an angry response to questions about the death of a child who had recently been in the agency's care — that a number of officials had been dismissed in the last two weeks.

Today, Ms. Harris described the departures of the senior staff members as retirements. But some state officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that at least some of those who made that choice had effectively been forced out.

"Some portion of these people were told that they'd be better off leaving," one official said.

However, an official with the union that represents many child welfare workers denied that any of those who left had been pressured and said that the departures were in fact retirements.

"As far as I know, a whole group of people who devoted their lives to protective services retired," said the union official, Hetty Rosenstein, president of Local 1037 of the Communications Workers of America. "I am not aware of anyone being fired."

The reorganization at the top of the agency comes six months after the governor promised to reform the problem-plagued agency following the death of Faheem Williams, a 7-year-old whose body was found in a basement in Newark.

The state's review of its handling of Faheem's case showed that his file with the division had been closed 11 months before his body was found, even though an abuse allegation that had been made against his family had not been fully investigated.

A spokesman for Mr. McGreevey, Micah Rasmussen, said the moves were a sign that the changes that the governor had promised were being implemented.

"We think it underscores that there's a shake-up under way at DMFS," Rasmussen said. "This is just a small part of it."

Mr. Cotton said there were striking similarities between New Jersey's current situation — overburdened caseworkers, inadequate investigations, lack of foster parents — and what he faced as an administrator of the Department of Children and Family Services in Illinois about a decade ago.

"Kids getting injured when they're known to the system is something that was going on," Mr. Cotton said.

Prompted by a string of high-profile child deaths, Mr. Cotton and other welfare officials in Illinois developed what child welfare officials in Illinois developed what

dropped about 16 percent. After five years, Mr. Cotton said, that rate dropped 50 percent.

The head of Nevada's child welfare division for the last two years, Mr. Cotton said his priorities as the New Jersey agency's new director would be improving the quality of foster homes, broadening training for staff members using new measures of tracking case files, and determining child safety.

"If the state takes somebody's kid, there's an obligation that you're going to do a better job than they did," Mr. Cotton said.

Benjamin Wolf, of the Illinois chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, has been closely monitoring the Illinois child welfare agency since he won a class-action lawsuit against it in 1991. He gave Mr. Cotton marks as a reformer.

Mr. Wolf praised Mr. Cotton's work as the head of the department charged with investigating abuse complaints, improving training and introducing quality-control measures. Mr. Wolf said the risk assessment protocol was an innovation of Mr. Cotton's tenure.

"It just helped structure the way people thought about things," Mr. Wolf said. "Questions might seem obvious, but in the press of the moment it can help have guidelines."

The result, he said, has been much more accurate prediction of where children would occur at the same time that the state actually took fewer children into custody.

Copyright 2003 The New York Times Company

Commissioner Harris issues statement about DYFS personnel changes

TRENTON— New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS) Commissioner Dolyn L. Harris issued the following statement today in response to the personnel changes at the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS).

"Due to the Early Retirement Incentive (ERI) Program, the division is undergoing some unprecedented changes in management," said Commissioner Harris. "Though this presents us with an excellent opportunity to address accountability, we are faced with the formidable task of replacing people who have brought a wealth of knowledge and experience that can never be replaced."

Currently, there are 25 management vacancies including a 32 percent vacancy rate for district office managers. The Department has been advertising for all of the positions and has received more than 400 resumes to date. The following is a list of 23 DYFS managers who took advantage of the ERI option by June 30, 2002 along with their official retirement:

Eleven District Office Managers

Retiring 07/01/03

Mary Clifford-McCardle- Metropolitan ARC

Gayle Netta- Southern Monmouth DO

David Oldis- Atlantic DO

Reuben Ryder- Jersey City DO

Fred Rhinehart- Gloucester DO

Retiring 9/1/03 David Mallory- Cumberland DO

Retired 4/1/03 Alice Carducci- Morris DO

James Dowman- Edison DO

Peggy Kehs- Cape May DO

Sharon McCobin- Hunterdon DO

Retired 1-1-03

Martha Curtis- Northern Monmouth DO

Twelve Trenton Central Office and regional officer managers/executives:

Retiring 7-1-03

Doris Jones, Acting Director

Ronald Burschini, Supervising Administrative Analyst, Contracts

Helene Levine, Administrator, District Office Operations, Southern Region

Janice Malec, Deputy Director

Bonnie Schwebel- Assistant Director, Southern Region

Barry Silverstein, Assistant Regional Administrator, Service Operations

Raymond Wolfinger, Assistant Director, Legal Regulatory Affairs

Retired 6-1-03

Rick Franzen- Administrator, Business Operations, Southern Region

Retired 4-1-03

Thomas Crook, Chief of Investigations

Faye Hollender, Supervising Administrative Analyst, Policy Development

Retired 1-1-03

Frederick Lowe, Supervising Administrative Analyst, Program Evaluation

Cindy Parks, Management Improvement Specialist

In addition, Robert Sabreen, Assistant Director for the DYFS Metropolitan Region was recently reassigned to DYFS Central Office in Trenton. Vicki Amoroso, District Officer Manager for Newark District Office #2, has also been reassigned.

Finally, Commissioner Harris confirms that Edward Cotton, current director of Nevada's child protection agency, will become the new director of DYFS effective July 15, 2003.

McGreevey backpedals on DYFS shake-up

Human Services contradicts governor's statement on 'dismissals'

Friday

The state Division of Youth and Family Services has been without a director for nearly a year, including six months of the worst series of crises in the agency's long and troubled history.

Some have long been urging the McGreevey administration to appoint a director as quickly as possible to provide day-to-day leadership at the operational level. The priority, however, had to be finding the person for the job. We hope that newly appointed director Edward Coffey fits that bill.

He comes to New Jersey after a short stint as the top child welfare official in Nevada, before which he served six years as a deputy Illinois' version of DYFS. He will report to deputy human services commissioner Colleen Maguire, who will continue to lead the DYFS reform effort. Maguire has made a good start, and any line of authority that did not recognize that would have been a step backward.

Clearly this is an appointment that had to come from outside the agency. Since the death of Faheem Williams, whose corpse was found in a filthy basement, locked away with two nearly starved siblings, there have been many revelations about the failures of administrators up and down the line in the DYFS hierarchy.

In the Williams case, DYFS closed its file on the family without fully investigating charges of child abuse. Subsequent reports, based on DYFS files, uncovered more instances of children who died in the DYFS foster care system and found that one in every 10 foster children in New Jersey is subjected to abuse or neglect.

Anyone who thinks one appointment is going to turn this agency around does not appreciate the deep roots of the problems that plague DYFS and other children's services agencies.

Cotton's former state, Illinois, is often cited as a progressive example of children's services reform. But some there, like the Cook County public guardian, a public advocate, say that only lawsuits, such as the assignment of more judges to handle foster care adoption cases. That one change alone resulted in a drastic reduction in number of children under state supervision. The guardian recently filed suit again over the huge number of children who are incessantly bounced from one foster home to another. That suit says the Illinois system is filled with its own tragedies.

In truth, most states face the same problems that trouble New Jersey: many children in need, too few caseworkers to handle the load, too few foster homes and institutions to stand in for parents who cannot take care of their own children.

And there is an inherent contradiction in the state's role as investigator of abuse at the same time it is the agent for preserving the integrity of troubled families.

It will take concerted and consistent effort to shape the policies and staffing required to do right by vulnerable children and troubled families. It will also require the removal of those who have not done their job.

She also said that in the future, interviews with neighbors would be conducted more often. After Daniel's death, several neighbors came forward to say that they had heard sounds of abuse.

Copyright 2003 The New York Times Company

Official: N.J. didn't do enough for toddler

Inquiry into death uncovers problems

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO

June 14, 2003

Star-Ledger Staff

New Jersey's top child protection official conceded for the first time yesterday that the state could have done more to protect 21-month-old Daniel Soto, and said his beating death has prompted officials to adopt policies for child abuse investigations.

Immediately following the toddler's death at his family's East Windsor home June 4, Deputy Human Services Commissioner Colleen Maguire said social service agencies "seemingly did everything right" in their monitoring of the child and his brothers, who died for /Sp, re, infidopr

parent and social worker has said he would focus on ~~pro~~tection.

often-violent children.

The case files, dating to 1999, were released as part of a March 17 order by Magistrate Judge John Hughes of Federal District Court in Trenton, in response to a request in court by The New York Times. Judge Hughes ordered New Jersey officials to make public extensive portions of state foster care files that had already been released under court seal to Children's Rights Inc., a Manhattan-based advocacy group that is suing New Jersey's foster care system. Children's Rights is in settlement talks with the state.

As a result, since March thousands of pages of previously undisclosed records, including case files and accounts of investigations, have been made public. Those records included cases where children in foster

Eric Thompson, a senior attorney with Children's Rights, said DYFS fails to follow up in substantiated cases and make sure that institutions take corrective action.

At Ranch Hope, the files show, the worker who slammed the boy to the ground was ordered to attend a mandatory "crisis intervention refresher course." DYFS records show he did complete it.

Thompson also criticized DYFS for not insisting that its group homes and institutions have a qualified work force.

"Background checks are not even required, and (there is) a complete lack of adequate training ... and a failure to supervise and monitor the performance," he said.

Pay at such facilities is low, the work is demanding, and turnover is high, said Richard O'Grady, executive director of the New Jersey Association of Children's Residential Facilities.

"It's very difficult to attract people into the work, which is enormously challenging. To be good at it, frankly, there has to be an unusual level of commitment and experience," he said.

O'Grady said that Children's Rights' constant hammering of DYFS helped his group's members. Many have faulted the agency for moving too slowly to investigate abuse.

"Sometimes, while we wait for feedback, that (delay) puts us in an uncomfortable situation," he said.

Some child care advocates believe that institutional settings are rarely ever good places for disturbed kids.

"Children by and large do better with good families. The system lacks the ability to build a network of strong caregivers," said John Mattingly, a senior associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, a nonprofit national child welfare research and consulting organization.

"The design of these places does not lead to children leading lives all he said. "They need strong adults who care for them. That's why families work, not people working on shift in an institutional setting."

Mattingly said finding such a home, while not easy, is "not rocket science."

In Ohio, where he once worked, teenagers in institutional care brought to foster parent training sessions to talk about how much they wanted a family. Interest in fostering teenagers grew by 25 percent.

"It's not all that difficult to do. You can reach out to people who work at Boys and Girls Clubs, police officers. They are kids," Mattingly said. "They need a family. They are not perfect, none of us are."

Staff writer Russell Ben-Ali contributed to this report.

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

5:29) 20-JUN-2003 08:47 [John Searight \(search\)](#)

Bill to establish watchdog agency for DYFS clears legislative panels

BY KATHY BARRETT CARTER Star-Ledger Staff June 20, 2003

A bill creating an independent watchdog to oversee the Division of Youth and Family Services was unanimously voted out of two committees yesterday, moving the state one step closer to implementing a series of changes aimed at reforming the troubled child protection agency.

If the legislation becomes law, it will establish an Office of Child

"There has been strong support for this concept for a number of years," Assemblywoman Mary T. Preverte (D-Camden), adding that recent events prompted lawmakers to act now. Preverte chairs the Assembly Family, Women and Children's Services Committee, which approved the measure. Last night, the Assembly Budget Committee also cleared it, paving the way for an Assembly floor vote next week. It also needs Senate approval.

Since January, DYFS has been under intense scrutiny following the case of 7-year-old Faheem Williams of Newark. The boy's beaten and emaciated body was found in the basement of a Newark home 11 months after DYFS closed his case without investigating allegations of abuse.

Earlier this month, a second child under DYFS supervision, 21-month-old Daniel DeSoto of East Windsor, was killed, allegedly at the hands of his mother. DYFS workers had been meeting with his family regularly and prepared to tell the court that the family no longer needed state supervision.

Child deaths averaging around 20 per year and other problems with DYFS seen uncovered in court records made available through a lawsuit against the agency brought by Children's Rights Inc., a national advocacy group. The Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit has also come under heavy criticism for taking too long to confirm and act on allegations of abuse and neglect in foster care. The state's own data show one in 10 foster children is subject to abuse or neglect.

Gov. James E. McGreevey, who is leading the charge to reform DYFS, is expected to see the bill passed before the end of June.

"The events of the past six months have exposed, in the most tragic way, the need to reform the state Division of Youth and Family Services and strengthen state efforts to protect children and help troubled families," said Cecilia Zalkind, executive director of the Association of Children of New Jersey. "These proposals are good first steps toward that goal."

The Assembly Family, Women and Children's Services Committee approved a bill establishing a Task Force on Child Welfare to make recommendations for improving DYFS. Experts in education, health, social services and juvenile justice will be appointed to the panel, which will develop and critique reforms. The panel's job also will entail coordinating the efforts of different governmental offices and community agencies to identify children at risk of abuse.

"The thought behind some of this legislation was to streamline and allow one voice to speak. This is a way to try and unify that voice," said Meredith L. Schalick, special assistant for children services in the Department of Human Services.

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

5:30) 21-JUN-2003 07:27 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

RELEASE: June 18, 2003

DHS Commissioner: GOP Budget Proposal Will Cut Services to Some of NJ's Neediest Citizens

New Jersey Department of Human Services Commissioner Gwendolyn Harris said today the budget proposal outlined by Republican leaders this week would hurt the state's efforts to make improvements at the Division of Youth and Family Services, slow down the plan to increase community services for people with mental illness, and threaten federal certification at state institutions for people with developmental disabilities.

"If this budget proposal is enacted, it would deliver a major blow to the work we are trying to do at the department to transform child protective services and improve care for people with mental illness and developmental disabilities," said Commissioner Harris.

Proposed cuts in capital funding, said Harris, will threaten implementation of the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) which is key element of the DYFS Transformation plan.

"I am deeply troubled that the cut in capital funding will threaten this long overdue and critical component of the DYFS Reform effort," Harris said.

The \$5 million cut in the Redirection Two plan eliminates some funds necessary to develop community residential programs and related support services necessary for more than 300 patients being discharged from psychiatric hospitals. This cut would mean the department could not expand community mental health services aimed at reducing unnecessary hospital admissions and alleviating overcrowding at state hospitals.

The 10 percent cut in non-salary direct state services would directly impact training of staff, the use of medical specialists and replacing outdated medical equipment at the state's developmental centers. That damage the department's continuing efforts to improve care of residents of developmental centers and endanger federal certification and funding of the centers.

"Overall, I am concerned this budget proposal would have a serious impact on department programs and would jeopardize critical services," Harris said.

RELEASE: June 17, 2003

Human Services responds to latest Children's Rights documents

TRENTON – New Jersey Department of Human Services Chief of Staff Deborah Bradley Kilstein issued the following statement today in response to the latest round of Children's Rights documents: Children are at risk in residential programs in New Jersey. Over the past several months, the following actions have been taken:

Developed a more comprehensive program to expand the number of unannounced licensing inspections at residential programs

Closed problematic residential programs that fail to meet licensing regulations (FDM Dorms, Monmouth County- November 27, 2002 and Beta House, Camden County- March 14, 2003)

Closely monitoring residential programs while moving forward with licensing revocation (Newark Transitional Supervised Living Programs, April 22, 2003 and May 5, 2003)

Developing stricter child staff ratios in residential facilities to allow for better supervision of children

Required annual training for residential staff on the use of physical restraints including escape, release and defensive blocking techniques.

This administration inherited a child protection system full of problems and we are addressing them. Time and time again the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) was not provided with the resources needed to protect our children. Even more troublesome has been the lack of accountability at every level. It is a system without the proper checks and balances and we are now moving forward to put them in place.

Earlier this month, my office began its evaluation of IAIU's regional offices. As previously announced, investigations of alleged child abuse or neglect in foster homes, institutions, schools and out-of-home settings by

The researchers also found that youth and family services did not thoroughly investigate charges of abuse. In nearly 60 percent of cases where the state found no abuse, it should have, they said.

The lawsuit took on increased significance for state officials last January, when the body of Faheem Williams, 7, was found in a basement along with two of his brothers, who were emaciated. An outstanding allegation that the children were being abused had not been investigated

at the division and review the agency's progress, sources said.

"This will bring in real partners for a team effort," an administration official said.

The Casey Foundation played a similar role in New York City after the settlement there of a 1998 class-action lawsuit brought by Children's Rights against the city's Administration for Children's Services.

People familiar with the talks said Gov. James E. McGreevey's deputy of operations, Kevin Ryan, worked through the weekend to complete the agreement.

Administration officials said yesterday Ryan would not disclose details of the plan, but McGreevey will discuss the settlement today.

Children's Rights sued DYFS in 1999 over what it called the agency's chronic understaffing, poor management of cases and lax supervision of children in foster care and in troubled families, among other problems.

Representatives from the advocacy group, which has released several reports in recent weeks detailing the agency's failure to protect children in its care, could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Lawmakers in the Assembly and the Senate have in recent months proposed reforms for the embattled agency whose problems came to the attention this January after the death of Faheem Williams, a 7-year-old Newark boy who had been under the agency's supervision. Faheem's emphysema was discovered in a plastic storage bin in a basement, almost a year after DYFS closed his case without first visiting him.

Among the many proposals before the Legislature is the creation of an Office of Child Advocate to review DYFS' performance. The child advocate proposed as a semiautonomous unit within the Department of Law and Safety, also would have the authority to investigate the state's responsibilities of abuse or neglect, as well as to inspect juvenile detention centers and foster homes.

Other legislative measures include mandating criminal background checks of staff members who work with children in such settings as residential facilities.

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

5:32) 24-JUN-2003 22:28 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

RELEASE: June 24, 2003

McGreevey Announces DYFS Settlement

New Jersey Child Welfare Panel to oversee reform effort; Reform plan to include all of the agency's children, not just those within the lawsuit

(TRENTON)—Governor James E. McGreevey announced today that the State signed a settlement agreement that will resolve the federal class action lawsuit against DYFS, Charlie and Nadine H. v. McGreevey, which originally filed in August 1999.

The parties agreed to immediate steps to ensure the safety of child DYFS care. These steps include conducting safety assessments on every child in DYFS custody, immediate review of licensing standards for foster homes and residential treatment centers, and an immediate round of front-line workers. The safety assessments will be made publicly available. The Office of the Governor and the Department of Human Services will jointly oversee these immediate measures.

"This is a truly innovative agreement and is a major step forward for children and families in New Jersey," said McGreevey. "We have reached a settlement that acknowledges our commitment to fix DYFS and lay the foundation for implementing even more broad-based reforms."

In addition to the \$14.3 million increase in funding for DYFS submitted in the Governor's budget for fiscal year 2004, the Governor agreed to allocate \$8.05 million to support additional hiring, fund space and equipment needs of the new workforce, and provide other needed child welfare resources. An additional \$1.5 million will be set aside for immediate foster parent recruitment effort.

The overall framework of the settlement involves the creation of the New Jersey Child Welfare Panel comprised of national experts to guide the State in transforming the system. The Panel will be funded through a generous contribution from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a nationally recognized foundation focusing on child welfare reform.

As part of the State's ongoing efforts to reform the child welfare system, the New Jersey Child Welfare Panel will work with DHS for the next six months to develop and begin implementation of a reform plan. The plan will include both immediate and long-term reforms to be undertaken by DHS, with outcomes for children that must be achieved over time.

Although the lawsuit was limited to the approximately 11,000 children in out-of-home-placements, the Governor and the Annie E. Casey Foundation have agreed the Panel will help DYFS to develop and implement a comprehensive child welfare reform plan for all 50,000 children who come into contact with DYFS annually.

"I applaud Children's Rights Inc. for their passionate commitment to children. I am especially grateful to the Annie E. Casey Foundation for their generous financial support. We welcome the formation of the New Jersey Child Welfare Panel, which includes some of the country's most respected child welfare experts. This agreement will undoubtedly help New Jersey bring dramatic improvements to the child welfare system," said McGreevey.

"Today is a good day for the children of New Jersey," said Department of Human Services Commissioner Gwendolyn

- Children in out-of-home placement should be protected from abuse and neglect and, to this end, investigations of allegations of abuse and neglect in out-of-home placements should be timely, thorough and complete.
- Adolescents in out-of-home placements should be provided with the skills, opportunities, housing and permanent connections with caring adults they need to successfully make the transition to adulthood.
- Decisions about children in out-of-home placement should be made with meaningful participation of families and of the youth themselves to the extent they are able to participate.
- In order to protect children and support families, New Jersey's child welfare system should operate in partnership with the neighborhoods and communities from which children enter care.
- New Jersey's child welfare system should be accountable to the public; to other stakeholders; and to communities throughout the State.
- Services to children in care and their families should be provided with respect for and understanding of their culture. No child or family should be denied needed service or placement because of race, ethnicity or special language needs.
- New Jersey's child welfare system should have the infrastructure, resources and policies needed to protect the best interests of the children in its care.

The lawsuit was filed in August of 1999 by Children's Rights, Inc., a Manhattan-based child advocacy organization and Lowenstein, Sandler P. Of Roseland, New Jersey. The action alleged that the State's protection system violated the substantive due process rights of children by not adequately protecting them. In March 2002, the Court ruled that the case could proceed as a class action on behalf of children in DCF's custody, and the parties began settlement discussions in February 2003 in mediation with former New Jersey Supreme Court Justice Blackart

(Short bios are attached.)

Steven D. Cohen

Steven D. Cohen is a Senior Consultant at the Annie E. Casey Foundation where he works with child welfare systems in New York, Tennessee and Philadelphia to help them design and implement system-wide projects. From 1999 through 2001, he served as Staff Director for New York City's Special Child Welfare Advisory Panel. The Panel was an expert body assembled by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to assist New York City in improving its child welfare services. The Panel came about because of the settlement of a lawsuit against the City of New York v. Giuliani, and represented an effort to resolve litigation in a creative, less adversarial manner. From 2002-present, he serves as a member of a revised panel known as the New York City Child Welfare Advisory Panel, which continues to assist the Administration for Children's Services. Since mid-2001, he also serves as Chair of the Technical Assistance Committee working with the Tennessee Department of Children's Services, again as part of the settlement of a lawsuit against that agency.

Before joining the Casey Foundation, he was Associate Executive Director at the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, where he worked in various capacities from 1986 through 1998. He led the agency's strategic planning efforts; helped to guide it through multiple transitions brought about by such changes as the advent of managed care and developing needs in the Jewish community; and took the lead in planning merger and affiliation opportunities. Earlier, had various other responsibilities at JBFCS, including directing its administrative operations (finances, human resources, MIS, and facilities management) for approximately three years.

Kathleen Feely

Kathleen Feely first joined the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 1990. She managed the design and implementation of the Family to Family and Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiatives (JDAI) and oversaw state reform work in six states. With regret, she left her post as Vice President after seven years, departing in 1997 to spend a few years in

the Netherlands when her husband was appointed Director of Development for NIKE Europe. Since returning to the United States and the Foundation in 1999, Kathleen now serves as Managing Director of the Casey Strategic Consulting Group and is also a member of the Senior Leadership Group of the Foundation. She and her staff are evolving a team-based approach to strategic consulting that melds together the analytical frameworks of private sector consulting with the best knowledge that Casey has about public systems that serve families and children. With her direction and guidance, staff work with state or city human services agencies that are poised for reform. The team approach reform work systematically to understand the issues, collect data, respond to policy and political implications, and develop outcomes-based strategies to improve systems for families and children.

Kathleen's career spans more than two decades of high-level administrative, policy, and philanthropic work in systems serving families, youth, and children. Prior to joining the Casey Foundation, Kathleen spent a year as a Senior Policy Consultant at the Center for the Study of Social Policy in its New York City office. By then, she had already earned national recognition as a resourceful groundbreaker serving as Deputy Commissioner for Planning and Program Development at the New York City Department of Juvenile Justice. It was there that Kathleen designed an innovative case management system that won the prestigious Ford Foundation/Kennedy School Government Innovations Award in 1986. Before her appointment to the Department of Juvenile Justice, Kathleen was a policy analyst in the New York City Mayor's Office of Operations, and also worked extensively in developing programs for juvenile and adult offenders in New York and New Jersey. She earned her Master's in Labor Education from Rutgers University in New Jersey, and holds a Bachelor of Arts in History from the University of Wisconsin.

Protection of Children, which is one of four community partnership sites originally funded by the Ethna McConnell Clark Foundation Children's Program.

Before joining the CSSP, Ms. Meltzer was a research associate at the Center for the Study of Welfare Policy and a lecturer at the School of Social Administration at the University of Chicago, and for several years led for the Chicago regional office of DHEW. Ms. Meltzer has a Master's Degree in Social Welfare Policy from the University of Chicago.

5:33) 25-JUN-2003 06:10 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

New Jersey Deal Grants Panel Powerful Role in Foster Care

By RICHARD LEZIN JONES and LESLIE KAUFMAN NYT June 25, 2003

To settle a lawsuit over the failures of its foster care system, New Jersey agreed yesterday to one of the most sweeping transfers of authority ever to a court-mandated overseer, according to those involved in the lawsuit and those who follow similar litigation.

The five-member panel will help state officials develop a detailed plan to change New Jersey's embattled child welfare agency. It will set concrete targets and time frames for improvements in at least 11 separate areas of child welfare.

If the panel finds the plan insufficient, the settlement will be voided and the state must admit liability for violating children's constitutional rights and provide relief ordered by the court. The state has no recourse if it disagrees with the panel's findings on this.

Once the plan is approved, if the panel finds the state is not meeting its targets, it can allow Children's Rights Inc., the child advocacy group that filed the lawsuit, to return to court and ask for penalties.

Gov. James E. McGreevey acknowledged the expansive scope of the agreement at a news conference at the State House in Trenton yesterday. "Today marks the recognition of a new era of openness, cooperation, accountability and one singular clear goal: namely, the well-being of New Jersey's children," he said.

Praising his former adversaries at Children's Rights as "the protectors of children," he added, "Frankly, for too long, New Jersey failed to meet this obligation. We fell far short. As governor, I refuse to defend the status quo."

While there was celebration at the State House, critics have begun to grumble about regarding the settlement. Some worried that the state had given away far too much authority and others questioned where the money would come from to support a vast overhaul of the agency.

The settlement is a victory for Children's Rights, a Manhattan-based group which filed the lawsuit in 1999. The group accused the state of endangering its foster children with inadequate and substandard care.

As part of the discovery process, Children's Rights was given access to extensive state records showing that as many as one in 10 children in foster care were being abused and that the state had erred in 60 percent of the investigations of complaints in which it had found no abuse.

The shortcomings of the Division of Youth and Family Services precipitated the lawsuit — in 1998, a blue-ribbon panel said the child welfare agency was in crisis. But the death of one child, Faheem Williams, a 7-year-old whose case file was improperly closed by the division just 11 months before his body was found in a Newark basement in January, helped galvanize public opinion and convinced the governor that drastic action was warranted.

Although the lawsuit covered only children in foster care, the independent panel will have the mandate to consider all areas of child welfare. A comprehensive road map must be developed within six months, according to the settlement.

The panel is also charged with setting goals for 11 areas of foster care as part of the plan. It will, for example, set the

Hope for the children

Trenton Times

Thursday, June 26, 2003

BY EDITORIAL

There is nothing more basic to a civilized society and to a great democracy than to care for its children, and particularly the most vulnerable of its children. For far too long, New Jersey has failed to meet this obligation. We fell far short.

- Gov. James E. McGreevey, June 24, 2003

The governor stated the case accurately. And, it should be said, his own commitment to fulfilling this most basic of state responsibilities has been more manifest and consistent than that of many of his predecessors in office. Still, in the end, it has taken a hard-nosed advocacy group, a federal court and an unspeakable tragedy to force New Jersey to a point at which one can realistically hope for a better system.

This week, the state settled a four-year-old class-action lawsuit brought by Children's Rights Inc. on behalf of children under the T52 0.aid, hiswhon 7t by Ccacy g2 0.aiem.

BY ROBERT SCHWANEBERG
Star-Ledger Staff

Children's Rights Inc., the Manhattan-based advocacy group whose lawsuit to force New Jersey to improve its beleaguered Division of Youth and Family Services was settled yesterday, has brought similar suits in nine other states and the District of Columbia.

From Connecticut to New Mexico, it has negotiated consent decrees forcing child welfare agencies to speed up adoptions, hire more

Despite a legal mandate to report mistreatment, most people hesitate -- for many reasons

The reporting problem is a national one, said John Holton of Prevent Child Abuse America in Chicago. "The public is confused about whether or not the intervention at the state level helps or hurts a child," Holton said.

"Clearly, if a child is being seriously malnourished, or assaulted, people want the child removed. But after that, the outcomes for those children after the state gets involved is very poor in a lot of states," he added.

Before the drowning death of Christian Manookian, DYFS investigated his parents three times. One investigation was prompted by the death of another son, Jack Jr., 20 months old, who strangled on the cord of a window blind in Old Bridge in 2001.

DYFS did not substantiate neglect or abuse in Jack Jr.'s death, or at any time. Christian's death had a different result. Police learned he was being supervised by a 5-year-old sister when he died. They also found heroin, marijuana, guns and ammunition in the family's home in Wyckoff.

When Syska read about Christian's death, she remembered how much she had worried about him. And she remembered sharing her fears during phone chats with her daughter.

"I would say, 'Oh good, I hear the baby crying,' because I would sometimes think I didn't hear the boy crying and wondered what happened to him. Because I knew he wasn't watched," she said.

Syska's daughter also recalls the conversations.

"My daughter reminded me just the other day -- she said, 'You knew he was going to die,' Syska said. "I said, 'That's a terrible thing to say.'"

Not long ago, Syska picked up the phone and called DYFS, on behalf of the Manookians' two remaining children. While their parents are in jail, they are with relatives.

"I called and I said, 'I want to tell you that when the family lived here, these kids were not watched,'" Syska said. "I told them I was worried, afraid something would happen to the other children if the parents got them back.

"And the DYFS worker basically said, 'Is that it?'"

A variety of factors discourage many people from reporting suspected abuse, said Randi Mandelbaum, director of the Child Advocacy Clinic at Rutgers-Newark. Some people simply don't want to "rat out a neighbor," she said. Others are not sure what constitutes abuse.

"What's discipline and what's not?" he asked. "It's hard. It's a very fine gray line and it depends on the facts of each case."

In the case of Elijah Kelly, a 4-year-old Passaic County boy who died of traumatic head wounds in May 2001, family friend Abhishek Nair said that he didn't call authorities despite seeing the boy's mother punch and whip her son because he "didn't know how to handle it."

The mother, Tauleah Kelly, has since pleaded guilty to manslaughter. Her boyfriend, Jeremiah Parker, a former New York Giants football player, was convicted of child endangerment.

"When she told me I can't tell her how to discipline her kid, I felt she was right," Nair said. "I've never called 911 for someone disciplining their son."

Prosecutors use the state mandatory reporting statute sparingly. Failing to report is a misdemeanor and carries up to a \$1,000 fine and six months in jail.

"Unless someone fails to report with a sinister motivation, what we do generally is to educate people and move on to the next case," said Joseph A. Del Russo, a chief assistant prosecutor in Passaic County who has been handling child abuse cases for a decade.

"We need the community to be vigilant," Del Russo said. "Child abuse is usually a secret, behind closed doors. Sometimes it spills into the yard, or the car. We want neighbors to report."

Staff writer Mary Ann Spoto contributed to this article.

5:41) 30-JUN-2003 07:47 [BarryKeefe \(keefeb\)](#)

June 30, 2003

Mental Wards at New Jersey Hospitals Are Made Doubtful as Foster Homes
By RICHARD LEZIN JONES and LESLIE KAUFMAN

At Trinitas Hospital in Elizabeth, N.J., roughly three dozen patients in the children's psychiatric ward, and more than half of them are foster children stuck there simply because the state has nowhere else to put them.

Hospital administrators and child welfare officials say the situation is sad, but not unique.

In the children's psychiatric ward at St. Clare's Hospital in Boonton, for instance, roughly one out of every six patients is a foster child who was classified upon admission as among the state's most troubled. Hospitals admit that these children, after being stabilized, no longer need to live in the unit, which is kept locked.

Across New Jersey, in fact, in nine such specialized wards, scores of the state's foster children have met the same fate in recent years. While in the custody of the state's Division of Youth and Family Services, children are admitted to the wards for emergency eight-day stays, but wind up remaining for weeks or months.

One foster child, records show, was in a locked ward for nine months of three months or longer, according to records, are hardly uncommon for foster children who have otherwise been cleared for release.

"The situation now is horrific," said Kathy Wright, executive director of the New Jersey Parents Caucus, a federally financed nonprofit organization that supports parents of children with psychiatric disorders. DDFS workers bring them there, if they have failed in a foster placement. But once they are in, they stay from 20 days to 180 days. Once a kid has a mental past or violent past, no one wants them."

Hospital administrators acknowledge that extended stays on the wards are seriously inappropriate. The wards were conceived as a triage stopover, where severe mental and emotional problems could be diagnosed and treated, and then the children moved on to long-term care in a residential program or to their own homes.

The conditions in the wards, by most accounts, are clean and well-tended. Professionals are on duty, and treatment is given. But the wards, known as Children's Crisis Intervention Services units, were designed for long stays. Thus, officials concede that children kept there often go without consistent schooling, if they get any at all. And because of security concerns, the children, even once they are stabilized, days go without even a walk outside.

More than 300 of the 4,000 or so New Jersey children who spent time in the inpatient wards in the last year — children ages 6 to 17 — were foster children. They spent, on average, a month in the wards, four times as long as the average stay for other children.

Hospital administrators, child welfare officials and others say there is no real alternative — that scarcely any spots are available in residential after-care, and that even fewer foster families are capable of caring for difficult children.

State officials, who last week agreed to turn over control of much of the state's child welfare system to an independent oversight panel, said they had been working to address the problem of prolonged and unnecessary stays in the psychiatric wards. But the challenge, they admit, is formidable, one made even more difficult in recent years.

According to state figures, 700 more patients spent time in the wards in 2002 than five years ago.

Most of the children who enter the psychiatric wards are admitted by families not involved with New Jersey's child welfare system. Because those children are able to return to their own homes, their stays in the wards typically last a week.

DMV or urban schools or suburban sprawl. In this particular case, haven't we been trying to reform DYFS for decades? Decades?

Well, yes. But this attempt has the potential to be dramatically different, because the settlement's required remedies trigger a process that should create an unprecedented sea change in the agency.

"We've done something landmark," says Kevin Ryan, McGreevey's deputy of management and operations. "This is the first time a panel will be articulating what the benchmarks are, how to meet those benchmarks and the outcomes will be for children. And this will be enforceable in federal court."

The panel he's referring to is the New Jersey Child Welfare Panel, a group of national experts who will monitor the marching orders set forth in the settlement. It will be funded and staffed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a national foundation whose sole focus is child welfare reform.

It is depressing but true that meaningful changes in DYFS were going to be realized as a result of tragedy. For years, people have been describing the agency as a tinderbox, one day destined to ignite and explode. The first of those explosions occurred six years ago with the death of Amara Wilkerson, a 2 1/2-year-old who was beaten to death by her mother's boyfriend. That case prompted Children's Rights Inc. to institute a class-action suit against the state on behalf of all children under its protection, and -- as if to underscore the urgency of the argument -- several other tragedies have followed while the case made its way through the legal system.

But it was the death last January of a Newark boy, 7 1/2-year-old Lem Williams, that may have created the ultimate pressure to reach an agreement. The "never again" mindset it triggered put enormous pressure on the state to help forge a solution that would far exceed any mere vow of good faith.

At least while this case was fresh in memory, the public would dismiss all the familiar explanations for how this could happen: too few caseworkers, insufficient infrastructure. It's not that there wasn't more. It's just that a window opened during which a public that ordinarily doesn't pay much attention agreed that DYFS must have the proper tools to safeguard the well-being of society's most defenseless.

Retired state Supreme Court Justice Stewart G. Pollock, who mediated negotiations, says he "never had any doubt that everyone wanted to do the right thing." The only differences, he said, were over "how you get there." That's totally understandable.

Now, of course, the real question kicks in: Will this settlement solve these complex, deep-rooted problems?

Marcia Robinson Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights Inc., says "confident" is not a word she would use "when we're trying to reform a system that has been so bad for so long." But she will say the settlement creates "the very best set of circumstances to make (the governor's) statement a reality."

It includes "very specific commitments," Ryan notes, starting with a plan that within six months will address everything from DYFS management structure to out-of-home placement, including the care environment, keeping siblings together and the amount of time children spend in foster care.

"We're fixing a very troubled system," says Ryan, "but it will be a better system because of the collaboration.

"Quite frankly," he adds, "we need these experts. We need the Casey Foundation and this highly qualified panel so we can avoid mistakes other states have made."

Ten other states have come to similar settlements with Children's Rights Inc., he says, but New Jersey "is the first to call for an expert panel of people who have been through this, the first time these types of people have been given authority and power."

Lowry says she is "pleased by the governor's attitude that he is going into this grudgingly or reluctantly." She's also pleased that the

MARY JO PATTERSON Star-Ledger Staff

July 10, 2003

The undertaker scooped the white pine box holding the body of Jaquan from the trunk of his hearse, and carried it to a freshly dug grave. It was light as a bread box.

In under five minutes, the burial was over. There was no service graveside, no ceremony, and no grieving relatives, just the undertaker and a caseworker from the N.J. Division of Youth and Family Services. Jaquan, a premature baby, was seven days old when he died, the eighth child of a heroin-using mother.

Between 1998 and 2002, 123 New Jersey children died of neglect abuse, and Jaquan was among them. Yesterday his name appeared among that 55 additions to the tally, which the state Department of Human

In emotionless, telegraph-style, they frame the cause of each death

"Mother and father admitted to beating Elliot over a period of time. Father admitted to hitting the infant with a car seat, one such report states in the case of Elliot Burgos, a four-month-old boy killed on 4/1/2000.

"Rhakida Daniels, mother of Aljaneer, left her son in the care of a friend's ten-year-old son, while she went out for fast food," states another, filed in the July 28, 1998 death of Aljaneer Caraway, a four-month-old boy. "It appears the 10-year-old was unable to cope with Aljaneer's crying and punched the baby in the stomach and head."

At the press conference, Harris said one of the most disturbing trends uncovered by the report shows that the number of very young children suffering fatal neglect or abuse has been on the rise since 1998.

In the five-year study period, children 12 months old or younger accounted for almost 57 percent of all deaths. But the proportion of children who died before their first birthday has risen, from a low of 46 percent in 1998 to a high of 66.7 percent in 2002.

Boys under one year were more likely than girls to die from neglect or abuse, the report said. Overall, however, the deaths were fairly even split between boys and girls; boys accounted for nearly 54 percent of fatalities.

Jersey's death toll of abused children is similar to other states in northeastern United States. In 2001, state fatality data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect showed abuse and neglect deaths ranged from a rate of .32 deaths per 100,000 child population in New Hampshire to 7.89 per 100,000 in Delaware. New Jersey has a rate of 5.8 while Pennsylvania has 1.65 and New York 1.67.

Harris underscored the need for improved services to mothers who use drugs. About 80 percent of the DYFS caseload consists of parents who use drugs, according to state officials.

"We've got to start acting like this is more the case as opposed to the exception," she said.

Harris also said the department, under the direction of deputy commissioner Colleen Maguire, has begun a systematic attack on the agency's documented shortcomings.

"We started in Newark," she said, which had 19 children die as a result of abuse or neglect from 1998-2002. "We are meeting with a cross-section of folks, agencies we contract with, health professionals, may be law enforcement, to look at what we are doing and what we are not doing."

Finding successful ways to intervene in the life of drug-using mothers, especially those who have had a number of children, is extremely difficult, said Michelle Rennert, a social worker in the neonatal intensive unit of University Hospital in Newark.

"Most of the time, with mothers with a long history of drug abuse, the intervention doesn't seem to be very successful," Rennert said.

At University Hospital about 8.3 percent of all live births involve mothers with a history of substance abuse, said Elmer David, attending neonatologist at the hospital and an associate professor of pediatrics at New Jersey Medical School/UMDNJ.

"Drugs add insult to injury," he said. In addition to the usual risks posed by prematurity, drug-exposed babies have other daunting medical problems, such as feeding intolerance, necrotizing enteritis and bowel syndrome, he said.

DYFS not only knew about Jaquan Holmes' mother use of drugs; it also provided drug treatment services. It also had also provided her with foster care services, medical care, transportation, clothing, shelter care, respite care, homemaker services, and psychological services. After Jaquan died, DYFS paid one last bill for a funeral and burial.

By the time he was born, on Dec. 11, 2002, his mother had already given birth to seven children.

One was already an adult, and the other six were wards of the state. **YES** had taken away all her children. Her

The foundation's rise to local prominence stems from a June 2004 settlement between DYFS and Children's Rights Inc. the national advocacy group that sued the state for violating the civil rights of the 11,600 children DYFS supervises in foster homes, group homes or institutions. The lawsuit accused DYFS of putting foster children at risk of abuse and neglect, and trapping them indefinitely in a cash-strapped, mismanaged system.

Children's Rights and the state agreed an independent panel of child welfare experts was needed to devise a new blueprint for DYFS, and gave the Casey Foundation a prominent place at the drafting table. The Casey senior staff to occupy two of the panel's five seats. Casey will supply the full-time staff to assist the panel.

"Casey is the country's largest and most revered child welfare foundation, with a huge corpus and investments in every single state," said Kevin Ryan, Gov. James E. McGreevey's deputy chief of management operations. "And here we were squarely in the midst of the country's most notorious child welfare nightmare. It was a natural place for Casey to want to be. It was a matter of us convincing them they needed to be here."

The nightmare is the case of 7-year-old Faheem Williams, who was found dead in January. The case prompted the state to settle the 4-year-old

New Jersey has failed a federal audit of its embattled child welfare

With a new quality assurance team in place -- including an oversight committee involving officials from every local and regional office, and an automated tracking system, the same mistakes will not go unnoticed again, said. "We will make sure the changes will make a lasting difference."

Marimon of DYFS said the state had a hard time correcting its mistakes the 2000 audit because "the automation was not there to track it. The state is about to replace its antiquated computer system with the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System, which should automate and simplify many of the paperwork demands DYFS employees must meet.

"By the beginning of September, all offices will be trained. ... Once institutionalized, it will be easier to track and address any problems," Marimon said.

In June, the state settled a federal class-action lawsuit brought by a children's advocacy group that accused it of underfunding its child care agency and trapping foster children in a system that puts them at risk of abuse and neglect. Under the settlement, a panel of national child welfare experts will oversee the state's reforms.

New Jersey is far from being the only state that struggles with local foster aid reimbursement rules, according to child welfare experts.

"Determining eligibility of foster children for (federal) funding is a complex issue. Some states are more successful than others," said Pat Wilson, a senior consultant at the Child Welfare League of America, a national research and advocacy organization in Washington, D.C. "The issue of Title IV-E eligibility would be better if it were simpler."

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

5:49) 07-AUG-2003 06:54 [John Searight \(searigh\)](#)

Work soars for child welfare staff

Surge in abuse calls following Faheem Williams tragedy outpaces the expansion of DYFS

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO

Star-Ledger Staff

August 07, 2003

In the seven months since the discovery of a Newark boy's remains a push for reform, the state child welfare agency has been swamped with new reports of abuse and neglect. Meanwhile, its hiring of new workers has failed to keep up, causing caseloads to soar.

The number of abused and neglected children being monitored by the State Division of Youth and Family Services jumped 24 percent to 58,300 from January through July, according to statistics compiled by the Association for Children of New Jersey.

That pushed the average number of children monitored by each district caseworker to 41 last month, up from 32 at the end of last year, according to DYFS spokesman Joseph Delmar.

A combination of new abuse complaints that must be investigated, backlog of cases waiting to be closed, is outpacing the state's efforts to reduce caseloads by hiring new workers.

DYFS officials partly attribute the surge in abuse complaints to publicity surrounding the death of 7-year-old Faheem Williams in Newark. The boy's battered and emaciated body was found in a relative's basement 11 months after DYFS had closed his case without investigating allegations of abuse.

"The number of calls has risen drastically," DYFS Director Edward Carron said yesterday. Not all calls turn out to be bona fide cases of abuse or neglect, but it takes time to determine that, he said.

Cecilia Zalkind, executive director of the Association for Children of New Jersey, a watchdog group on child welfare

issues, said the increased cases could benefit the children involved -- if the DYFS staff can handle

"If it means more cases are opening appropriately and not closed because they need to be open, that's a good thing," Zalkind said.

But she added: "More critically, what is the impact on staffing? How many more caseworkers will be needed? If workers are dealing with more cases, what does that do to the quality of work for children who need help?"

In the aftermath of the Williams case, Gov. James E. McGreevey and Human Services Commissioner Gwendolyn L. Harris pledged to overhaul DYFS and earmarked \$14 million in February for 271 new positions, including 65 caseworkers and 47 supervisors.

Since then, DYFS has hired 99 caseworkers and front-line supervisors, but they simply filled vacant positions, Delmar said. There are still 38 vacancies to fill before the agency "breaks even" and starts adding positions.

But for DYFS -- where it typically takes three months to hire someone -- this is progress. "We are doing quite well," Delmar said, noting that the number of vacant positions two years ago climbed to 150. "We continue to get a large number of people applying for positions."

A last-minute addition of \$4 million in June to the DYFS budget will allow the state to add even more caseworkers and front-line supervisors, although how many is under discussion, Cotton said yesterday. "There is no reason to delay. We have the authority to hire," he said.

Unionized DYFS workers sounded skeptical about the state's resolve to hire enough workers.

"The caseloads are amazing ... It's at crisis proportions," said Rosestein, president of Communications Workers of America Local 1037, which represents 2,000 DYFS workers. "That's why we need a caseload cap," Rosestein, referring to proposed legislation that would set a limit on the number of children supervised by a single front-line worker.

"Left to their own devices, (the administration) will not hire enough staff," Rosestein said. "I have numbers now in Sussex County, where workers have 70 or more cases, including one with 100. In Sussex County? Unprecedented."

DYFS officials say it is not surprising their agency is following a high-profile tragedy like the death of Faheem Williams, which makes the public more aware of the problem of child abuse.

"We're getting twice as many referrals as we had been since February," Deputy Human Services Commissioner Colleen Maguire said in a recent interview. "Workers are actually frightened not to attend to these cases because they have caseloads that have increased across the state, some higher than others."

More cases often means workers don't have the time to complete the required interviews and paperwork to close a case that no longer needs the state's intervention, Maguire added.

Cotton noted that some of the complaints DYFS receives do not warrant intervention. "One call consisted of a child throwing rocks at a cat and urinating in the yard. We dealt with it as an investigation, but investigating a parent for neglect in this case is inappropriate."

To help inundated workers, Cotton will deploy senior staff later this month to examine older case files and to talk to staff to determine whether select cases need to be closed, he said. The senior staff is doing himself -- would then complete the paperwork and make visits to the families to close out cases.

He said of the caseworkers, "We will take that burden off of them so they can do social work."

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

The documents released yesterday were designated in a court order by United States Magistrate Judge John Hughes. In March, Judge Hughes ordered New Jersey officials to make the documents responsive to a court action brought by The New York Times.

The files were previously in the possession of Children's Rights, a Manhattan-based advocacy group that sued New Jersey over its foster care system and had been given the confidential records as part of court proceedings.

From April to June, three sets of state records were released by Judge order. On June 24, Gov. James E. McGreevey announced a wide-reaching settlement with Children's Rights that, among other things, called for the creation of an independent Child Welfare Panel to help overhaul the state's foster care system.

Yesterday, Children's Rights officials said they hoped that the files were made public would be used as a tool in the state's effort to change the way it cares for foster children.

"It's always shocking to read the case file details, as recorded by them, of abuse of children," said Eric Thompson, a lawyer with Children's Rights. "This should be a further wake-up call to the state."

Mr. Thompson was particularly troubled because in many of the records released yesterday, caseworkers had ruled that allegations of abuse were unsubstantiated.

"It's essential that trained professionals be able to recognize the signs of abuse and neglect in order to protect these children," he said.

A spokesman for the State Division of Youth and Family Services, Delmar, said the agency was determined to improve its performance.

Mr. Delmar said the agency was reviewing its licensing requirements for caregivers, conducting safety reviews of foster children and increasing its monitoring of foster home and other programs by taking steps to make more unannounced visits.

"We will continue to move forward with our transformation plan with support and guidance from the Child Welfare Panel," Mr. Delmar said.

Copyright 2003 The New York Times Company

DYFS failed to pay heed to signs of child abuse

Advocate releases data about 37 cases

BY MARY JO PATTERSON Star-Ledge Staff August 12, 2003

The 6-year-old foster child certainly looked like a classic case of abuse or neglect.

He rooted through garbage at school looking for food. His clothing was filthy. He showed up one day with an untreated burn. He said his foster mother beat him.

Yet an investigation by the state Division of Youth and Family Services in 2002 failed to substantiate abuse or neglect. The boy's foster home was eventually shut down, but only at the request of the foster mother.

Confidential records in that case, and 36 others where DYFS failed to substantiate reports of abuse or neglect involving foster children, were released yesterday by Children's Rights Inc., the New York group that sued DYFS in 1999 for failing to protect its foster children.

The case was settled June 23, when DYFS agreed to a court-supervised emergency reform. Three days earlier,

however, a judge gave the plaintiffs permission to publicize internal DYFS documents considered critical to their case.

Yesterday, they released 2,900 pages, saying they presented additional evidence that New Jersey's child welfare system is dysfunctional. Names of children and foster parents were removed.

It was the fourth time since April that Children's Rights has released a batch of documents appearing to damn the state's child protection agency. Lawyers for the group said it was likely to be the last.

The newest documents reflect the work of DYFS' Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit, which is responsible for investigating reports of abuse to children in residential and foster care.

"These reports offer dramatic evidence that New Jersey has been trying to protect its foster children," said Marcia

and a now-closed program called Newark Transition Supervised Living.

Twelve of the 21 reports of alleged maltreatment or neglect at the institutions involved charges that workers inappropriately restrained teenagers.

Five of the remaining nine reports detailed sexual encounters between supervised residents.

Children's Rights has previously faulted IAIU.

In May, it distributed a report commissioned from a professor at the University of Maryland that blamed the unit for discounting far too many complaints.

"IAIU findings decisions were found to be professionally unreasonable 25% of the time," wrote the author, Diane DePanfilis, co-director of the university's Center for Families. "First-hand observations by DYFS workers

On May 2 of this year, Linda Calbi overdosed on prescription medication. DYFS workers arranged for her to obtain outpatient alcohol and drug treatment and to see a therapist. The Calbis then decided themselves that their boys would live with their father.

It was unclear last night when or why the boys moved back with their father.

Matthew is the 18th child to die this year from suspected abuse, Delmar said. Many cases are still under investigation and this number may change.

DYFS has endured seven tumultuous months since the body of a 7-year-old boy, Faheem Williams, was found in a Newark basement in January. DYFS workers had closed the Williams family's case 11 months earlier without investigating a complaint that Faheem and his brothers had been beaten.

A state report issued this year revealed that of the 123 child deaths in New Jersey between 1998 and 2002, 81 of the victims had been under DYFS supervision at one time.

Staff writer Robert Gebeloff contributed to this report. Copyright 2003 NJ.com

5:52) 20-AUG-2003 07:40 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

For Relatives of Beaten Boy, Tears Trump Finger-Pointing

By RICHARD LEZIN JONES NYT

August 20, 2003

NEWARK, Aug. 19 — There was no second-guessing of a system that should have failed again.

Instead, for the family of 14-year-old Matthew Calbi, who the police believe was beaten to death by his mother on Sunday — just two months after New Jersey child welfare officials returned him to her custody — there is nothing but grief.

"Somebody said to me, 'Is the family pointing fingers at this point?'" Brian Sokoloff, Matthew's uncle. "I said, 'They're so numb, they don't even know they have fingers at this point.'"

So now, Mr. Sokoloff said at the home of Matthew's father, Christopher Calbi, in Teaneck, N.J., there is only mourning for the boy, who was a juggler, a fan of hip-hop music, and the kind of teenager whose idea of a world was a place where the Yankees never lost another game.

And today, family and friends tried their best to remember Matthew's threads of his young life rather than the attention given in his death.

The authorities believe that Matthew was punched and kicked so badly by his mother, Linda J. Calbi, during an altercation Sunday afternoon that she suffered massive internal bleeding that led to his death. Ms. Calbi, 47, of Tappan, N.J., has been charged with murder and child endangerment and is being held in bail of \$1 million.

State child welfare officials, already under intense scrutiny, have promised to look into their handling of the Calbi family's case. Matthew died about three months after he and his brother were temporarily removed from Ms. Calbi's custody by child welfare officials concerned for the boys' safety after the authorities said she overdosed on prescription drugs. A month later, she was given custody again.

It was one of four investigations of the family since 2001. A spokesman for the child welfare agency promised a thorough examination.

"We're going to conduct an exhaustive review," said Ed Rogan, spokesman for the state Division of Youth and Family Services. "As with any of the cases we deal with, we want to get to the bottom of it. Certainly, if there are any failures found, we are going to address them."

The agency has come under intense scrutiny since the body of 7-year-old Emanuel Williams was found in a locked Newark basement in January.

The state has promised a sweeping overhaul of child welfare. As part of that effort, it settled a lawsuit in June with Children's Rights Inc., a Manhattan-based advocacy group, by agreeing, in part, to the creation of an independent Child Welfare Panel with broad powers to reshape the agency.

Social work experts have pushed for change, citing child deaths at the state that they say could have been prevented. They also cite the agency's routine failure to recognize what experts say are obvious signs of abuse.

In Matthew's case, investigators found that two allegations of abuse against his parents in the last 18 months were not substantiated.

While the state began its review of the Calbi family's case file, Calbi declined to speak to reporters today. Mr. Sokoloff, who acted as the family spokesman, said the Calbis divorced several years ago. Officials placed Matthew's brother, Dean, 9, in Mr. Calbi's custody.

Mr. Sokoloff, who declined to discuss the family's dealings with child welfare officials, said the family members were focused solely on helping one another through the grieving process.

"I'm not interested in dealing with the political issues," he said. "I'm worried about my family and keeping it intact, and keeping 9-year-old, Matthew's brother, who is also the joy of everyone's life, safe to spare this kid from as much of this horror as is possible."

Mr. Sokoloff said Matthew was an active, charming teenager. He joked his nephew had only one fault: his love of the Yankees.

"We have endless debates about it," said Mr. Sokoloff, a Mets fan. "Among my many, many deep regrets is one trifling regret that he wasn't able to live long enough where I could say, 'Matt, you see, the Mets are better than the Yankees.'"

The two also had playful debates about music. "He was endlessly trying to convince me of the artistic merit of rap music, and he would make CD's and say, 'listen to this, listen to this,'" Mr. Sokoloff said, noting that his response was always the same: "Matthew, this is not music."

"It's hard to fathom that he's not here," Mr. Sokoloff said. "He was always a bright light to many people."

Copyright 2003 The New York Times

DYFS role in teen death spurs probe

Charges of fatal beating by mom leave angry governor 'frustrated'

BY ANA M. ALAYA AND RUDY LARINI

Star-Ledger Staff August 20, 2003

Gov. James E. McGreevey ordered an investigation yesterday into whether

5:53) 20-AUG-2003 07:55 [John](#)

to 67 percent in 2002. The main causes? Increased prenatal drug abuse, shaken baby syndrome and male adults physically abusing children.

Cotton has some good ideas, chief among them establishing an assessment system that could reduce the number of repeat abuse cases of children under state care. He got good results with that system when he was at the Illinois Division of Child Protection.

But he will need all sorts of support, much of which is required by legal settlement. Still, McGreevey, Harris or Maguire will have to keep track of all these groups and reforms to make sure efforts are complementing each other, not duplicating or working at cross purposes. Someone at the top will have to make sure reports and recommendations aren't set aside. Unions will have to be more flexible.

And the state will have to scrape together more money to hire experienced staff, to pay for more training to review decisions made about cases, and for all of the cars, phones, computers and other equipment that workers keep children safe.

The troubles at DYFS are as deep as the troubles that threaten so many New Jersey's suffering children. Even a perfect state agency could not protect every child from harm.

But as Eric Thompson, senior staff attorney with Children's Rights said of DYFS:

"Certainly we can do better than this."

© 2003 Philadelphia Inquirer and wire service sources.

5:55) 23-AUG-2003 07:28 [John Searight \(searigh\)](#)

The pressure just bumped up another notch. Our work is indeed for us, and our responsibility is considerable.

DYFS report uncovers laxity in boy's death

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO August 22, 2003 Star-Ledger Staff

The Bergen County mother accused of beating her teenage son to death this week did not receive proper scrutiny from the state child welfare agency, which failed to see how chronic turmoil in the home was threatening the child's safety.

Human Services officials shared these conclusions with Gov. James McGreevey yesterday following Monday's death of 14-year-old Matthew Calbi. Bergen County authorities have charged his mother, 47-year-old Linda Calbi, with murder. They allege that she battered her son during a long confrontation Sunday morning at their home in Old Tappan.

McGreevey, in the midst of overseeing an overhaul of DYFS since early, demanded an accounting of DYFS' role in the case. The answer came yesterday and they left him "very concerned," said Micah Rasmussen, McGreevey's spokesman.

"It was clear to him the family did not receive all of the attention they warranted," Rasmussen added. "The supervisor should have recognized the escalating physical conflicts and repeated substance abuse issues."

The Calbi family had a 2 1/2-year history with the state Division of Youth and Family Services, and an active file at the time of the boy's death. The mother also had a history of alcohol and drug abuse, according to authorities, who believe the Sunday fight began over Linda Calbi's drinking the previous evening.

The internal report to the Governor also says:

It is too early to say whether DYFS was in any way at fault. Even if the agency does its very best, it cannot provide absolute protection against dangerous parents.

However, DYFS has not earned the right to the benefit of the doubt.

DYFS must take a hard look at itself to see if Matthew's age or family's zip code in any way influenced decisions about how much protection he needed.

The sad truth is that DYFS has yet to show that it can or does handle

of 10 children, who were at such risk that caseworkers decided to remove them immediately and place them with other foster families. The risks included child abuse and inadequate care.

The findings were included in a report about efforts by the agency, the State Division of Youth and Family Services, to meet the terms of a sweeping settlement agreement that ended a lawsuit filed against the State by Children's Rights Inc.,

you will."

There were other missteps in the case, she said. When DYFS first opened a case against Calbi after a traffic accident in March 2001, Matthew's father was never interviewed.

Then after the mother took an overdose of prescription drugs in May 2003, DYFS workers interviewed Matthew and his brother Dean, 9, six days later instead of within 24 hours as state policy requires.

Maguire said she will meet with case supervisors in September to talk about evaluating abuse allegations and recognizing "escalating" risks.

The agency is also going to "get very prescriptive," DYFS Director Edward Cotton said. To help guide the staff, he said he is working on rewriting "nebulous" definitions of the 35 recognized types of abuse.

Maguire also spoke yesterday of continuing changes within DYFS, which has been under intense pressure to reform after the scandals involving the agency's failure to safeguard children it was monitoring.

Maguire said 10 children have been removed recently from foster homes and other facilities as part of a statewide review of the safety of the more than 12,000 children in the foster care system. So far, assessments have been done for about half of the children.

The safety assessments are being performed as part of the settlement of a lawsuit brought by Children's Rights Inc. of Manhattan on behalf of abused New Jersey children.

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

5:59) 23-SEP-2003 20:40 [John](#)

acknowledge that the number of cases handled by each worker has since the beginning of the year.

The cuts, as well, took tools from the hands of the dwindling number of workers, including their cars and cellphones. Even children's car seats were allowed to become scarce.

To those who worked both for and with the agency, the late 1990's, with general budgets, were particularly demoralizing because, to them, the cuts seemed entirely without rationale.

"You would hear someone like the governor saying she wanted to do it," said Bernice L. Manshel, who was the agency's director until 1982 and then watched as DYFS was dismantled in the subsequent decades.

But, she said, "there was no depth of knowledge or real understanding of the needs."

Perhaps the most searing example of a failure to invest in the system concerned what many current and former government officials regard as the tragedy of the agency's computer system.

In the mid-1990's, the federal government passed a series of sweeping care reporting requirements that demanded among other things, that each state have a centralized database to track foster children for federal matching funds.

With an ancient computer system, and with many agency offices using complete paper files to document cases, New Jersey knew it had to allocate money for the new system as early as 1997, when it actually spent \$7 million to buy computers.

In fiscal years 1999, 2000 and 2001, new money to pay for the software networking for the system was dutifully allocated in the budget. Then, like a slow-motion train wreck, the money was removed at the 11th hour in compromises. The state now says the computers bought in 1997 are dated and of low quality.

But for many child welfare workers, and the judges and lawyers who worked with them, almost no budget cut was more counterproductive than the failure to provide the services that might have improved the family conditions for vulnerable children.

The number of residential substance abuse treatment slots specifically for children — drug abuse is one of the most frequent factors in child abuse cases — has not increased in the last four years, as the foster care population took off. Parents struggling with substance abuse often wait months to gain admittance to such treatment programs, advocates for the parents say.

Children, then, were frequently removed and placed in an already taxed foster care system.

"The situation is quite desperate," said Nancy Goldhill, vice president and assistant general counsel for Legal Services of New Jersey, which represents parents in cases against the state.

Money alone, of course, does not explain the dizzying decline in quality of the state's services. Mismanagement and neglect also took their toll.

To run an effective child welfare system, said Ms. Manshel, the former agency director, "it takes sustained interest."

"And at the highest levels of policy making," she said, "there was a lack of interest."

As a result, experts say, New Jersey was often late — too late in adopting some of the most basic case practice innovations in child welfare even as they became common in most other states.

It was only in 2001 that New Jersey agreed, for example, to offer care stipends to relatives of foster care children who took them in — a step long known to be crucial in poor communities.

"New Jersey was late to recognize kinship care," said Rob Geen, a research associate at the Urban Institute, a

Ryan, 36, an attorney and father of five, spent nine years as ~~an~~ associate executive director of Covenant House, the Newark youth shelter that hosted yesterday's ceremony.

The new law sets up the Child Advocate as an independent agency that ~~will~~ inspect juvenile detention centers, foster homes, youth shelters ~~and~~ any other private or public facilities or programs that serve children.

The office will have a budget of \$2 million and a staff of about ~~100~~ dozen social workers and attorneys. They will work out of the Attorney General's Office in Trenton and two small satellite offices in Newark ~~and~~ South Jersey.

Staff will run a 24-hour toll-free complaint hotline and possess ~~power~~ powers to subpoena records, investigate complaints and even sue the state ~~on~~ behalf of children's rights -- something Ryan said he would ~~hesitate~~ hesitate to do.

"Frankly, the streets of heaven are too crowded with the children ~~of~~ New Jersey," Ryan said.

Ryan told the group he would begin work by monitoring foster care ~~home~~ abuse and neglect and investigating overcrowded juvenile facilities.

The governor has touted the Child Advocate as one of the main ~~reasons~~ reasons to rebuild credibility in the Division of Youth and Family Services ~~following~~ following a string of high-profile child abuse deaths in the past ~~months~~ months.

In January the agency was rocked by news of the death of ~~William~~ Williams, a 7-year-old boy whose body was found in a Newark basement. DYFS acknowledged it had closed its case file on the Williams family ~~investigating~~ investigating an allegation of abuse.

In June, Ryan and Deputy Attorney General Stefanie Brand ~~settled~~ settled with Children's Rights Inc., a national advocacy group that ~~sued~~ sued the state for violating the civil rights of the 11,600 children ~~in~~ DYFS serves in foster homes,

The discovery of the alleged abuse in Collingswood, a middle-class community bordering Camden, marks a stunning new blow to the state's troubled Division of Youth and Family Services, which approved the adoptions and which has been in close contact with the family. A caseworker had visited the home 38 times in the past two years.

At least five DYFS employees, among them supervisors and managers, have been suspended, and more suspensions are expected, said Micah Rasmussen, a spokesman for Gov. James E. McGreevey. An "angry and shocked" McGreevey has directed the state's newly appointed Child Advocate to investigate the case, Rasmussen said.

Vanessa Jackson, 48, and Raymond Jackson, 50, were arrested Friday after police discovered one of the

about being loving parents. The kids are described as very bright, friendly."

What police found when they were called to the area earlier this month conflicted with the DYFS reports. On Oct. 10, a neighbor of the Jacksons dialed 911 to report someone rooting through her trash at about 2 a.m.

When Collingswood police arrived, they found what they believed to be a probably 10, hunting for food, Sarubbi said. The youth, at 4 feet tall and 45 pounds, turned out to be the 19-year-old, Sarubbi said.

The teen led police to his house, where authorities were stunned to find three other severely malnourished boys. A 14-year-old boy weighed 36 pounds. That child's biological brother, age 9, stood 3 feet 1 inch tall and weighed 23 pounds. The fourth child, age 10, weighed only 28 pounds.

Police immediately notified DYFS, which removed all seven children from the Jacksons' home. The four boys were hospitalized, while the girls were placed with foster families. Just one of the boys, the oldest, remained in undisclosed hospital yesterday with a heart irregularity, Sarubbi said.

"They've gained more weight in their time in the hospital than they did in seven years with the family," the prosecutor said.

In addition to the malnutrition, the boys had not seen a dentist in more than five years. Most of their teeth were rotting, Sarubbi said. All four had head lice. And they had been living without electricity for five months and without gas service for a month, an indication of the family's poor financial condition.

Sarubbi said the couple owed more than \$8,000 in rent on their home and defaulted on their purchase of two vacation timeshares, in the Poconos, Virginia.

The Jacksons are charged with four counts of aggravated assault and four counts of endangering the welfare of a child. While the boys did not appear to have been beaten, the aggravated assault counts were warranted because of the "extreme indifference to the value of human life," Sarubbi said.

The couple were held in lieu of \$100,000 bond in the Camden County court appearance had not been scheduled. The prosecutor said the investigation was continuing, and he would not discount the possibility of additional charges, either against the Jacksons or others involved with the boys.

Two adult children of the Jacksons, a man and woman in their 20s, also lived in the home.

With the exception of the foster child, the children were home-schooled, eliminating an additional safety net, and authorities said the boys rarely ventured from the property.

Outside the home yesterday, the brother of Raymond Jackson defended the couple, saying the boys' size was not a function of malnutrition but of fetal alcohol syndrome and the drug addictions of their biological parents.

"It has nothing to do with being neglected," William Jackson said. "They were born with drug addiction and eating disorders. As long as I've known these kids, they've never grown."

William Jackson said his brother works for a financial company, though he would not provide the firm's name. Vanessa Jackson is a stay-at-home mother.

"They've provided everything for them," William Jackson said.

Sarubbi dismissed that idea, saying physicians, including geneticists and house experts, extensively examined the children and found prolonged malnutrition to be the culprit in their failure to physically mature.

"These parents were literally starving their children," the prosecutor said.

Neighbors said they noticed the boys were painfully thin but did not suspect criminal negligence.

"The two boys who were so skinny, I thought they had AIDS," said Caroline DiMattia, who lives next door.

DiMattia and other neighbors said they frequently saw the children performing chores in the yard. At least two people said they saw the boys sitting on the lawn with a pair of scissors.

"They were always out here working their butts off," DiMattia said.

The home, beige with red trim, had an American flag at the doorway and yellow ribbons scattered about. A psalm was posted on a window pane in three places.

"As for me and my house, we serve the Lord," it said, a Bible notation.

The case comes at a particularly critical time for DYFS, which is undergoing a thorough overhaul in the wake of several high-profile failures. The process was ordered after the death of Faheem Williams, a 7-year-old Newark boy whose case had been closed by DYFS prematurely.

On Thursday, the agency announced it had completed an innovative safety assessment in which 14,393 children in foster homes, group homes and institutions had been visited and deemed safe.

The state was required to perform the unprecedented check under the terms of a lawsuit settlement DYFS reached with national advocacy group Children's Rights Inc., on June 23. Children's Rights had sued the state for violating the rights of foster children by putting them at risk.

Yesterday, the State Child Advocate, Kevin Ryan, questioned the safety of the safety assessments and vowed to launch his own investigation into what went wrong.

bail each.

Six of their seven children were placed in new foster homes. The oldest, a 19-year-old who weighed 45 pounds when found by authorities, ~~is~~ being treated at an area hospital for medical complications.

In the quiet neighborhood near the imposing Scottish Rite Consistory, residents said they wondered about the frail children they sometimes saw doing chores in their front yard.

"I thought maybe they were just ill," said Kristine Kordacki, 57, whose apartment overlooks the Jacksons' home. "I just feel horrible that maybe I should have called somebody."

A state official said some blame must fall on DYFS, an agency already reeling from reports of neglect and mismanagement. The agency two days ago completed a court-ordered safety review of the 14,000 children under its care.

A DYFS employee visited the Jackson home each month for the past year as the couple sought to adopt a 10-year-old girl already in their care, said Maguire of Human Services. She said other cases handled by the worker are being reviewed.

"There is serious incompetence, indifference or negligence associated with this case," she said, weeping. "There are no words."

Reach Jason Laughlin at (856) 486-2476 or jlaughlin@courierpostonline.com
Thank you for visiting www.courierpostonline.com

5:64) 27-OCT-2003 08:16 [Joh Searight \(searighj\)](#)

State bans three more in child abuse inquiry

DYFS vows to check on 1,000 other kids

Monday, October 27, 2003

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO AND JUDITH LUCAS Star-Ledger Staff

State child welfare officials suspended three more employees yesterday as they scrambled to find out why four severely undernourished boys adopted into a Camden County family escaped the scrutiny of caseworkers who visited the home dozens of times.

The Division of Youth and Family Services also promised to assemble a team of outside experts to check on 1,000 other children placed by the same office responsible for monitoring the Collingswood home of Vanessa Raymond Jackson.

The Jacksons were charged Friday with assault and endangerment after being accused of starving the four boys, who ranged in age from 9 to 19 but weighed less than 50 pounds each. Police discovered the conditions weeks ago after an officer found the oldest teen -- who was so small they thought he was 10 -- scrounging for food in a neighbor's trash can around 2 a.m.

The Jacksons remained jailed in Camden County yesterday, unable to post \$100,000 bail, as separate investigations emerged to untangle the latest in a string of horrifying cases involving neglected New Jersey children.

Gov. James E. McGreevey said he had ordered the office of the State Advocate to undertake its own review of DYFS' performance and submit a report within two weeks. Advocate Kevin Ryan said he would subpoena the agency or its personnel if they refuse to cooperate.

"I don't yet know how this happened, but I will," Ryan said.

Meanwhile, neighbors around the Jacksons' three-story Victorian struggled to make sense of the allegations. And some friends defended the couple, insisting the accusations are misguided.

"We've gone out with them to feed the homeless," said Mary Romafalka, a congregant at Come Alive New

The visits were required under a legal settlement with Child Rights Inc., a national watchdog that has sued New Jersey over its child welfare system. Eric Thompson, senior attorney for the group, said Friday the association will review whether the Jackson case represented violation of the settlement.

"We're going to need some quick answers on this because it calls into question the continued safety of every other child in foster care," Thompson said.

Gov. James E. McGreevey expressed outrage.

"What happened in Collingswood is simply unforgivable, and we're taking the necessary actions," the governor said after a bill-signing ceremony at Carteret Public Library.

McGreevey's comments were hauntingly similar to ones he made nearly 10 years ago after the death of Faheem

"In my heart of hearts, I don't believe this happened," said Mary Romaska, 52, of Cherry Hill.

Romaska and her husband, John, knew the Jacksons for 21 years. The families dined together, socialized and volunteered to help the needy in Philadelphia.

They never saw any sign of mistreatment, said John Romaska, who sang in a gospel choir with Raymond Jackson.

"Until we're proved otherwise, we're supporting them," John Romaska said. Authorities say they have a case that indeed proves otherwise.

The Jacksons, arrested on Friday, failed to provide adequate nutritional medical care for the boys. That resulted in "dramatic growth retardation and other serious health problems," Camden County Prosecutor P. Sarubbi said.

The Jacksons each were charged with four counts of aggravated assault and four counts of child endangerment. They remained in Camden County Jail Sunday on \$100,000 bail.

The boys - 19, 14, 10 and 9 - were locked out of the family's kitchen and fed a diet of uncooked pancake batter, cereal and peanut butter and jelly, authorities said.

The boys, who told investigators they gnawed on wallboard in search for more nutrition, had a combined body weight of 136 pounds when authorities removed them from the home on Oct. 10.

The children were in such bad shape because of problems with their pregnancies, said William Jackson, Raymond Jackson's brother.

"It has nothing to do with being neglected," William Jackson said. "They were born with drug addiction and eating disorders. As long as I've known these kids, they've never grown."

That isn't true, authorities reiterated Sunday.

"We were looking at all aspects of this for two weeks," said Bill Shralow, spokesman for the Camden County Prosecutor's Office. "Their medical histories and genetic makeup were part of the investigation."

The Jacksons' biological son and daughter, both in their 20s, also lived on the home, authorities said. Three other girls in the home - two adopted and the third a foster daughter the couple were trying to adopt - seemed to be in good shape, authorities said.

The alleged malnourishment of the adopted boys occurred even as a caseworker from the state Division of Youth and Family Services conducted monthly visits with the family. Those visits stemmed from the family's desire to adopt the 10-year-old girl already in their care.

The caseworker has resigned and eight to 10 other DYFS workers have been suspended with pay, state officials said. The agency has launched an internal investigation. Investigators have not ruled out the possibility of charges against DYFS employees.

A DYFS spokeswoman did not return calls seeking comment Sunday.

The boys always seemed small for their ages, Mary Romaska said, but their size never alarmed her.

One of the kids - Bruce Jackson, 19 - showed signs of an eating disorder and would eat to throw up, Mary Romaska said. The others were just "tiny kids," she added.

"When Raymond and Vanessa took them, they were already victims of abuse," she said. "All they wanted to do was take care of them."

Raymond Jackson, a 50-year-old financial consultant, and Vanessa Jackson, a 48-year-old stay-at-home mom, moved from Pennsauken about six years ago, friends said. They adopted the boys between December 1995 and July 1997.

growing family.

"I'd say, 'You got another one,' and they'd say, 'Well, we just loved them and didn't want to let them go, so we adopted them,'" Thomas said.

The Jacksons have attended the church for nearly 15 years, Thomas said. He described the kids as happy and joyful, always wanting to sit in the front row and willing to give anybody a hug.

Nothing about the family seemed amiss until Sunday, when Thomas returned from a trip to Nashville and learned Bruce Jackson - who was 4 feet tall and 45 pounds less than three weeks ago - was 19 years old.

"I think his real age shocked all of us," Thomas said. "He looked like 9 or 10."

Still, Thomas and others from the church insist there were no other warning signs, adding the kids would come to church cookout and eat normally like every other child.

"We were told their growth was stunted" because of prior medical conditions, Thomas said. "But that they were very loving little children."

"Ray is the kind of guy who goes out on Sunday afternoons and signs home to encourage older people," Thomas added. "He's not a monster, believe me. We want to know the truth as much as anyone."

Nobody answered the door Sunday at the Jacksons' home in the 300 block White Horse Pike.

A white Chrysler minivan and a passenger car sat in their driveway. Prayer Ranger action figure stickers clung to glass on the front door while placards in windows at the sides of the door read, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Pete DiMattia, who lives next door, said he saw a DYFS caseworker at the Jacksons' home at least once a month. He blames DYFS and the family for what happened.

"The kids never said anything about being mistreated," DiMattia recalled. "I'd say, 'Everything all right?' and they'd say, 'Yeah, Mr. Pete.' I knew they were skinny, but I had no idea."

Authorities had been investigating the Jacksons for about two weeks before their arrests. They got involved when a neighbor called police and

Extensive review of foster kids is complete

DYFS finds only 31 of 14,393 are at risk

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO Star-Ledger Staff October 20, 2003

After meeting a court-ordered deadline to visit all 14,300 of New Jersey's foster children, state child welfare officials announced yesterday that nearly all appeared safe, while 31 were found to be at risk and were relocated.

The Division of Youth and Family Services conducted the unprecedented review as part of its settlement of a class-action lawsuit brought on behalf of foster children by the national advocacy group Children's Rights. The settlement was reached in June as the state was taking heat over a series of high-profile child abuse deaths.

After meeting a 120-day deadline to visit all 14,393 foster children, including 786 living in 17 other states -- DYFS seized the moment yesterday to congratulate its beleaguered workforce.

"I want to emphasize the monumental task this was," Human Services Commissioner Colleen Maguire said at a news conference in Trenton yesterday. "This is the first full assessment of all the children ever conducted in New Jersey. It's a landmark effort."

Using a new process that no other state has tried before, child welfare workers used extensive interviews and a questionnaire to evaluate the immediate safety of children placed in foster care after being removed from their troubled families.

The workers determined 87 of the 14,393 children to be in harm's way, but elected to keep 56 children where they were, while helping their foster parents improve conditions in the home.

DYFS Director Edward Cotton said in one case, DYFS allowed a 12-year-old boy to stay with his foster parent-grandmother after helping her obtain a restraining order against the child's abusive grandfather.

But DYFS workers found 31 children to be living in unacceptable conditions they could not readily improve. Cotton said one example involved a 7-year-old whom the foster parent said she "could not control without hitting."

Maguire said these "safety assessments" would become routine.

"So much work remains to be done. We have a huge mountain to climb in New Jersey," Maguire said.

The chairman of the court-appointed Child Welfare Panel, monitoring the state's compliance with the settlement, agreed.

"They did a ton of work and they deserve credit," said Steven Gorn, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a child and family advocate. "They deserve credit for the work they did."

Mr. Ryan said he had begun an investigation of the operations of the division's office that dealt with the family, the Southern Adoption Resource Center. The center handles foster children who are likely candidates for adoption. Each child who came into the Jackson home through the foster care system was overseen by the Southern Adoption Resource Center, investigators said, adding that the caseworker was assigned to look after the 10-year-old girl whom the Jacksons were planning to adopt.

Once a child is adopted, officials said, the child is no longer assigned a caseworker.

Mr. Sarubbi said the adopted boys lived in a state of constant terror. They had lice, and their teeth were rotting because they had not seen a dentist or doctor for at least five years, investigators said. They were re-schooled by the adults and were not permitted to leave home often, investigators said.

In marked contrast to the four boys, the three girls were well fed, went to medical appointments and took vacations with their parents in Williamsburg, Va., where the family had a time-share apartment. The girls were permitted to order Chinese takeout while their brothers starved, Sarubbi said.

Yet the boys seemed unaware of their plight, he said.

"The parents had essentially brainwashed the children into believing they had eating disorders," the prosecutor said, adding, "The saddest part is I don't think the children even knew how bad off they were."

The family had financial trouble, Mr. Sarubbi said. They were \$8,000 behind on their rent and had defaulted on loans for their vacation time shares in Virginia and the Poconos, he said. Neighbors said Mr. Jackson worked as a mortgage broker and wore tailored suits, but investigators said he was now unemployed. The electricity had been turned off recently for four months, Mr. Sarubbi said, and the gas was off for a month.

Neighbors said that they noticed that the boys were small and thin, but Mr. and Mrs. Jackson had told them they had medical conditions that kept them from growing properly.

Pete DiMattia, who lives next door to the family, said he never thought of calling the police or a child welfare agency because he often saw a station wagon parked outside the house and assumed that the family was being supervised.

"I thought the kids had medical problems," Mr. DiMattia said. He said the boys were polite and respectful, referring to him as "Mr. Pete."

The evangelical church attended by the Jacksons, who are born-again Christians, is in Medford, about 20 miles away. Congregation members said they could not imagine that the Jacksons had starved their sons.

"There is no way on God's green earth that this happened," said Francis, 50, a member of the Medford congregation, the Come Alive New Testament Church, who said he has known the family for 15 years. He said children were lively and active members of the church, attended Sunday school, acting in pageants and singing.

Medical examinations of the boys ruled out any natural cause for their stunted stature, Mr. Sarubbi said. One boy, a 14-year-old identified only by his initials, K. J., weighed 38 pounds when the Jacksons adopted him. When he was removed from their home on Oct. 10, he was 4 feet tall and weighed just 40 pounds, Mr. Sarubbi said. After 13 days in a hospital, he was 4 feet 6 inches tall and weighed 50 pounds, Mr. Sarubbi said.

remains hospitalized, doctors are monitoring a possible heart problem. The girls living in these foster homes have also been placed in foster homes.

Marcia Robinson Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights in Manhattan-based child advocacy group that sued New Jersey over its foster care system, said the Jackson case was a stunning reminder of just how difficult it will be to right the troubled system. It was particularly distressing, she said, that the very process that was intended to find problem homes — the inspection of all homes with foster children — failed to help the Jackson children.

"I think we have got to immediately start talking about redoing a large number of these assessments because I don't know how many of them have been done and how many of them done appropriately," Ms. Lowry said. "It is clear that this system can't be fixed quickly."

Copyright 2003 The New York Times Company

5:66) 27-OCT-2003 18:40 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

de

The pastor, Harry Thomas, said he could not resist picking up the ~~hardly~~ ^{hardly} bigger than a 5-year-old, after service.

"He always liked to lead the prayers," said Bobbi Richardson, a ~~sunday~~ ^{sunday} teacher for Michael and Tyronne, "He prayed better than I did."

To Pastor Thomas and the congregation, the abuse allegation ~~impossible~~ ^{impossible} to fit with the image of the struggling family that always had small donation for the collection plate when it came around but ~~helped~~ ^{helped} from the church to pay for its electricity and rent.

"They were the first kids to come up to me and hug me, say ~~hello~~ ^{hello}," the pastor said. "Not Bruce, he was more in the shadows. But Michael ~~he~~ ^{he} would sit you down and have a conversation," he said.

The minister said the house seemed well kept, and their landlord ~~Andrews~~ ^{Andrews}, agreed. "The only thing I noticed was they were all unbelievably ~~well-behaved~~ ^{well-behaved}," Mr. Andrews said.

"I have told many people that I have never seen that many kids ~~together~~ ^{together} good. I never saw them fighting, and I never saw them arguing, and ~~did~~ ^{did}, 'Wow, every family should be like that.' "

Mr. Andrews said he was told that Bruce, the eldest, stole food ~~from~~ ^{from} refrigerator and then threw it up, and that a lock had been put on ~~the~~ ^{the} refrigerator for that reason. Mr. Andrews said his parents, who came ~~along~~ ^{along}, had urged the Jacksons to have Bruce put in an institution.

Ed Cotton, the director of the Division of Youth and Family Services ~~with~~ ^{with} Bruce Jackson on Sunday at the hospital where he is being treated ~~and~~ ^{and} was given a very different picture of his life than the pastor did.

Mr. Cotton said that it did not appear that Bruce Jackson had ~~friends~~ ^{friends}. "I asked him whether he went to church or not. He said that ~~he~~ ^{he} was not allowed to go because he was bad — because he liked TV ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~one~~ ^{one} of his big punishments was that he was made to sit in front ~~of~~ ^{of} TV for hours with it off. Stuff that doesn't make sense."

Mr. Cotton said the children may not have understood that they ~~were~~ ^{were} mistreated.

"I think these kids were convinced by the foster parents that they ~~had~~ ^{had} psychological disorders," he said.

Mr. Cotton continued, "These are bright kids, they read well, they ~~are~~ ^{are} polite, and I think they're realizing what happened was ~~not~~ ^{not} anywhere near the norm."

He said Bruce was eating well now. "I watched Bruce eat an entire ~~of~~ ^{of} Doritos," he said. "He asked me if I would go get him another bag ~~of~~ ^{of} barbecue. The nurse bailed me out on that by saying, 'That's not ~~allowed~~ ^{allowed} right now.' "

Michael Byrd, the neighbor who discovered Bruce in the trash ~~bin~~ ^{bin} on Friday, Oct. 10, said Bruce had managed to escape from the Jacksons' house that night only because their dog had died. Bruce ~~escaped~~ ^{escaped} out a basement window, Mr. Byrd said.

Chief Thomas J. Garrity Jr. of the Collingswood Police Department ~~said~~ ^{said} that Bruce emptied a box of cereal after he arrived at the station.

He was photographed holding the empty box, and clutching a ~~stuffed~~ ^{stuffed} that is kept on hand to comfort young abused children.

Copyright 2003 The New York Times Company

Uneven Care Not Unusual in Families, Experts Say

By LYDIA POLGREEN New YorkTimes October 28, 2003

When the police went to Vanessa and Raymond Jackson's home in Clarkswood, N.J., in the early morning of Oct. 10, they were stunned to find four boys ages 9 to 19 starved to the point that each weighed less than 50 pounds.

Investigators were also shocked to find that three girls, ages 5 to 12, in relative comfort in the rambling rented house. While the boys were locked out of the refrigerator and fed a diet of mashed potatoes and pancake batter, the girls ordered Chinese food, took vacations with their

Child Agency Tries to Grasp How Case Got Away

By LESLIE KAUFMAN and RICHARD LEZIN JONES New York Times October 28, 2003

In the eight months before the police found Bruce Jackson looking for in his neighbor's garbage, three different state workers had visited his adoptive parents' home a total of 10 times.

Yet none reported that there was a lock on the refrigerator, Bruce, 19, and three other adopted boys, ages 9 to 11 and all under 50 pounds, were so malnourished that their bellies bulged and their teeth had turned black.

The discovery, coming after a year of searing criticism, administrative reforms and intense news coverage of the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services, left agency and state officials demoralized and baffled as to how this one could have been missed. Nine workers who were responsible for investigating the household, either directly or as supervisors, will be terminated, agency officials said yesterday.

But critics of the system said it was incomprehensible that the state's welfare system could have failed so completely, so soon. They said the case cast doubt on reform that had already taken place.

"The most shocking thing is that you are not talking about a child in a revealing abuse, but a child who was evidence of abuse," said Cecilia Zalkind, executive director of the Association for the Children of New Jersey. "How is it that no one commented on the condition? Where were the schools? Where was the health system? Adoptive parents who want to be foster parents have to get medicals on everyone in the family. Why did this happen? And the inexcusable part is there was a caseworker involved. Did she just assume they were CecisMC wCbid ty?" place.

Bruce suffers from "depression and never fully developed physically and mentally." But she see this as a problem, ascribing it to the parents' explanation that the boys had eating disorders.

To outsiders, the idea that four children all had eating disorders so severe that their growth was stunted at preschool levels seems so unlikely to be laughable, but apparently the Jacksons convinced numerous state.

"From top to bottom, employees at the public agency believed mother's claim that these children had eating disorders," said Kevin Ryan, the state's independent child advocate, who is currently reviewing a web of multiagency interactions with the family going back more than a decade. "What we are looking at now is why no follow-up was done to verify this claim or get medical attention since these children obviously starving."

Copyright 2003 The New York Times Company

Panel discusses emergency measures to protect DYFS children

reg -6.52DC iEFF00A0vide.
blind leading the blind."

Under federal regulations set by the Child Welfare League of America, caseworkers are supposed to make monthly visits and spend at least an hour a home to spot medical, dental, psychological, emotional and educational needs of the children. In the case of the four boys adopted by Raymond and Vanessa Jackson, the Collingswood couple have been charged with starving the boys, aged 6, 8 and 10, who were so malnourished they weighed less than 50 pounds each.

State officials said there was no way such evaluations took place in the case of the four boys adopted by Raymond and Vanessa Jackson. The Collingswood couple have been charged with starving the boys, aged 6, 8 and 10, who were so malnourished they weighed less than 50 pounds each.

Thompson said investigations by his group found that cursory visits by caseworkers are common in New Jersey if the children are seen at all.

"The concern persists in New Jersey of these sort of drive-by visits," he said. "We know that a lot of these monthly visits do not occur."

Thompson said the average child in New Jersey's foster care system is visited by a DYFS caseworker only four times a year.

He added that depositions taken in the Children's Rights lawsuit also revealed that managers and supervisors at the adoption level of DYFS did not believe that detecting abuse and neglect of children was part of their job.

Gelles, who conducted a study of DYFS' practices as a witness in the lawsuit, said detecting problems of children in the welfare system requires specialized training that the state does not provide.

"New Jersey fails to invest in a competent, qualified work force," he said.

The Jacksons have been jailed, and their minor children are in foster care. Bruce remains in a hospital, where he is being treated for a heart problem related to malnutrition.

State officials were sanguine yesterday in his prognosis. Maguire, the physician who assessed the children "believe

Unlike some of the other notorious cases, the Jacksons' is the first to question DYFS adoption services. The first Jackson boy was adopted in 1995, with others following in 1996, 1997 and 2000. Two girls also lived in the house, and the couple was finalizing its adoption of a third girl who had been their foster child.

Under state adoption law, caseworkers must interview every household member before approving a family for adoption. Each person must also have a medical exam.

DYFS officials acknowledged that neither occurred in the Jacksons' case.

"It raises serious concerns regarding the following of adoption regulations," Delmar said.

Special Deputy Human Services Commissioner Colleen Maguire also is weighing a new policy that would require an annual medical exam of all children placed in adoptive homes.

It's also not clear to what extent the agency considered the Jacksons' ability to care for the children.

Raymond Jackson has been described by friends and officials as an insurance salesman and financial adviser who had trouble finding work. In recent months, the family fell behind on its electricity bill and owed more than \$9,000 in back rent.

The Rev. Harry Thomas of Come Alive New Testament Church in Medford said the church gave Jackson \$2,400 to help with costs.

That amount mirrored the amount the Jacksons received each month in state subsidies to cover basic needs such as food, housing and transportation for their children.

For each of their five adopted and foster children, the Jacksons requested an amount ranging from \$374 to \$473, based on the child's age. The family also received a separate clothing allowance that amounted to several thousand dollars, officials said. All told, the Jacksons collected more than \$30,810 in adoption and foster care aid for the fiscal year ending June 30.

But Delmar would not say if investigators believed the Jacksons were abusing the adoption system for financial reasons.

"It's always a major concern to us when their only source of income is the care of the foster children," he said. "On the surface, it appears that some of these people do it specifically for the money."

His comments came as several of the fired DYFS workers were called to a closed-door hearing in Trenton to answer the negligence charges against them.

Most of the workers were employed by the Southern Adoption Resource Center in Voorhees, one of six similar centers run statewide by DYFS.

The centers place roughly 800 children each year into adoptive families. They are required to conduct thorough examinations of the households before and after the placement. Most of the clients are people who pay thousands of dollars required for private adoptions. Children they adopt often tend to be of school-age, or with disabilities or other health problems.

Pat Bennett, a DYFS advisory board member and director at Concerns for Adoption, said the DYFS-run centers have earned a mixed reputation among those who follow the field. Some employ dedicated, talented caseworkers, she said.

In others, "the support that is really, really needed to make that is not always there."

The Voorhees-based center, which supervises placements in six Jersey counties, was faulted twice in the past two years in internal DYFS reports for improperly supervising children it had placed.

In February 2002, DYFS licensing officials cited six violations against Voorhees adoption center but let it continue operating under temporary certificate. The reports said the office failed to document that completed interviews with all household members in an adoptive family; failed to conduct mandated visits to an adopting family; failed to document it had privately interviewed children considered for adoption.

The violations were corrected last fall, but the office was cited again last year for failing to document family interviews.

Delmar, the DYFS spokesman, said none of the infractions appeared to involve the Jackson family but that officials were still examining the records.

Margaret Rovner, who managed the office, was among those workers who were fired in the wake of the case, sources said. Rovner hung up when called by a reporter yesterday.

Staff writers Susan K. Livio and Judith Lucas contributed to this report.

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

DYFS firings fought. Union defends workers in Jackson case

By LILO H. STANTON Gannett News Service October 29, 2003

TRENTON. The state's efforts to fire nine DYFS employees for failing to tell anyone about four malnourished Collingswood boys are baseless and violate their constitutional rights, union leaders said Tuesday.

"There was not a single shred of evidence that we've been given that would support a single charge against any worker," Steve Weissman, attorney for the Communications Workers of America, said after four of the employees finished "pre-termination" hearings.

Some of the employees - all of whom have been suspended without pay pending termination - had never met Raymond and Vanessa Jackson or the four adopted sons they are charged of willfully starving, Weissman added.

But the state Department of Human Services and Division of Youth and Family Services defended the disciplinary measures.

"Obviously, we felt the actions were both necessary and appropriate in light of the facts of this case," said state Human Services Commissioner Wendolyn L. Harris.

A notice served to one of the employees cites "neglect of duty, idleness or willful failure." The same notice quotes April Aaronson, deputy director of DYFS, as saying there is evidence in the records to confirm workers did not take sufficient actions.

The state contends the nine DYFS employees - including two managers represented by the CWA - failed to recognize or report signs of abuse or neglect at the Jackson home.

The boys - Bruce, 19; Keith, 14; Michael, 10; and Tyrone, 9 - weighed a combined 136 pounds when they were removed from their White Horse Pike home on Oct 10.

They had lived on a diet of pancake batter, cornmeal peanut butter and jelly, authorities said.

Raymond and Vanessa Jackson, each charged with four counts of aggravated assault and 14 counts of child endangerment, remained Tuesday at the Camden County Jail on \$100,000 bail.

Seven investigators from the Camden County Prosecutor's Office returned to the Jackson home about 7

p.m. Tuesday and entered through a side door. They were still inside the home at 11:15 p.m.

They would not say what they were doing or what they were looking for, but at least one detective did carry a bundle of items outside and drive away.

No court hearings have been scheduled, said Prosecutor Vincent Sabatelli, adding his office has received no word about who is handling the Jacksons' legal defense.

Bruce Jackson remained in the cardiac unit at Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center in Camden as of Monday, where he was being treated for an irregular heartbeat stemming from malnutrition. Hospital officials, citing privacy rules, would not confirm his presence or discuss his condition Tuesday.

The other boys, two of whom are biological brothers, all were treated and released from area hospitals. They now are in separate foster homes.

They visited with each other last week, said DYFS spokesman Williams, adding the agency gave them phone cards so they can keep in touch.

A fund established to benefit the boys collected about \$800 on Tuesday, Gerard Banmiller, president of the 1st Colonial National Bank in Collingswood.

The bank also received about 100 phone calls from people who wanted donations to the bank, Banmiller said.

While the fund raising is beginning, so too could the legal wrangling over the fate of the nine DYFS workers.

The state held pre-termination hearings for all nine on Tuesday, said Facciarossa, a DYFS spokeswoman. The hearings are part of the process required when firing government employees.

All nine, suspended without pay, have 10 days to appeal before their cases go before an administrative law judge, the final step before termination.

"It runs the gamut, from weeks to months, to resolve these issues," Facciarossa said.

Weissman called the hearings "a sham" because of what the union contends is a lack of evidence.

DYFS workers, who evaluated the Jacksons as they prepared to adopt a 10-year-old girl already in their care, visited the home 38 times in the past four years and did not report any abuse, officials said.

But union officials disputed the picture the state has painted of DYFS.

It is not proven as the state suggests that one caseworker visited the home 27 times, union officials said.

Union representatives did not identify the 25-year-old caseworker, but said she joined DYFS two years ago in what was her first job. She also retained a lawyer due to the possibility of criminal charges against her, union officials said.

The union also disputes the suggestion that the children's medical condition was obvious to all, noting many neighbors and family friends said the kids appeared small but otherwise healthy.

"We believe this is an incredibly horrible situation, and it deserves a response," said Carla Katz, president of CWA Local 1034, which represents DYFS workers in South Jersey. "We do believe there have been both systemic and individual failures, and there has been a failure of the community to get it right."

Those systemic issues include staffing, resources, and the foster homes, supervision and training, said Hetty Rosenstein, who heads the CWA local that represents DYFS workers in North Jersey.

"This is a system and an agency that has been collapsing under the weight of its own burden for about two decades,"

Rosenstein said. "If we don't address these systemic problems and instead fire nine workers, in fact happen again."

DYFS officials say they are doing all they can to prevent that.

The agency on Tuesday announced it will re-examine its policy of allowing children under its supervision to be home-schooled. The four Jackson boys were home-schooled, a circumstance some say could have helped the condition go unnoticed.

"When a child is in public or private school, there are more people seeing the child, which may allow us to see abuse or neglect earlier,"

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO Star-Ledger Staff October 29, 2003

One by one, the nine child welfare employees removed from their jobs allegedly mishandling a case that left four boys in Camden County starving appeared at closed-door hearings yesterday to face disciplinary charges against them.

A lawyer representing some of the staff described the hearings as orderly, tense and combative, yet lacking one crucial element: proof of any wrongdoing.

A copy of the disciplinary notice from the Department of Human Services said each worker was suspended without pay with intent to fire them for "neglect of duty, loafing, idleness, or willful failure to devote attention to tasks which could result in danger to persons."

In a box reserved for more detail of the charges, the notice read "You neglected your responsibilities for clients," followed by the children's initials.

"They presented not a shred of evidence to support the charges yet workers are being fired without pay -- workers with families, with children to support," said attorney Steve Weissman, representing some of the employees who are members of the Communication Workers of America.

"Two of the workers were last involved with the case in 2000," Weissman said, predicting the charges against them wouldn't hold up.

Special Deputy Human Services Commissioner Colleen Maguire contended employees -- from front-line workers, to an inspector, supervisors and managers -- believed Raymond and Vanessa Jackson when they said their adopted sons suffered from ongoing eating disorders. Yet there are no medical records in the family's file to support that claim, nor did DYFS demand such records.

The adoption caseworkers, in particular, didn't pay much attention to other children in the family, Maguire said, focusing only on the latest foster child the couple intended to adopt, a healthy and well-developed 10-year-old girl.

Human Services Commissioner Gwendolyn L. Harris issued a brief response to the union's remarks last night: "The department and the Division of Youth and Family Services stand by the disciplinary actions taken against the staff involved in the Jackson case. Obviously we felt the actions were both necessary and appropriate in light of facts of this case."

The employees worked in the Southern Adoption Resource Center in Mottville, the Camden County district office, a regional office in Hammonton, and the department's central office in Trenton.

According to sources familiar with the case who spoke on condition of anonymity, the disciplined workers included the family's last caseworker, Frances Ransome, a two-year employee whom officials say logged 27 visits home; veteran managers Margaret Rovner and Bettye Fowles; and supervisor Eladia Gonzalez, a 15-year veteran.

Efforts to obtain comment from the workers by telephone and at their homes were unsuccessful.

The labor leaders, holding a news conference in Trenton in between hearings, walked a delicate line yesterday. They agreed with the department's assertion that people must be held accountable for their part in the boys' suffering, yet demanded that DYFS management not trample the rights of their workers in the process.

"Everybody feels very desperate about DYFS," said Hetty Rosen, president of Local 1037 Communication Workers of America, which represents some of the employees. "The governor and the commissioner feel really badly because they have to have the public's confidence that DYFS is going to do its job and protect children. We agree with that. We understand that level of desperation because we share it. We don't think quite the way to do it."

Typically civil service employees are entitled to a departmental hearing at which they can challenge disciplinary

action against them, but in this instance, the workers have opted to skip that process and strike, Rosenstein said.

CWA official Paul Alexander said in the state's rush to hold employees accountable, it failed to build a solid case.

"If they can demonstrate they placed kids at risk or put blindness on, people need to be accountable for that," Alexander said. "Yet they're not putting out any information. They are just saying, trust us."

Staff writers John Martin and Mary Jo Patterson contributed to this report.

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

5:70) 29-OCT-2003 05:56 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

Child-welfare workers under criminal probe

Posted on Wed, Oct. 29, 2003

By Robert Moran, Edward Colimore, and John Shiffman and Staff Writers

Law enforcement authorities are scrutinizing the conduct of state welfare workers to determine whether they broke criminal laws in the way they handled the case of four starving Collingswood brothers.

Camden County investigators were reviewing hundreds of documents, including medical and adoption records, as they examined both the conduct of the parents and the Division of Youth and Family Services workers involved.

"The investigation is now two-pronged," said a senior official involved in the case. "One is about the parents. The other is a secondary criminal investigation of the DYFS workers."

One possible avenue of inquiry is whether state rules were followed in the gathering of medical records on all children in a home before an adoption is approved. In the Collingswood case, the four malnourished children had not seen a doctor in four years.

Meanwhile, the union representing the workers sharply criticized officials for attempting to fire them before the matter was fully investigated.

Last night, local police and the Camden County Prosecutor's Office executed a search warrant at the Jackson home on the White Horse Pike in Collingswood.

The shocking details of the case, including reports that the brothers parts of a wall to stave off hunger, once again have drawn national attention to New Jersey's troubled child-welfare system.

On Monday, officials said they would reassess the safety of nearly half more than 14,000 foster children in the system who had been visited in recent months as part of an overhaul.

Yesterday, union officials blasted top state officials for saying they would fire nine employees who handled the case.

"We have not been given any evidence whatsoever as to what allegedly done by these workers," complained Carla Katz, president of Communications Workers of America, Local 1034, as she took a break between disciplinary hearings in Trenton.

The nine hearings were conducted yesterday, and in each case, the suspensions were upheld, with termination proceedings to follow, state officials said.

Steven Weissman, an attorney representing six of the suspended workers, was confident that the state's actions would be reversed in arbitration.

"Those workers had their constitutional rights violated," Weissman said. He called the hearings a "sham" because all that was presented was a one-paragraph written statement from an administrator confirming there is evidence in the case record that [the employee] did not take necessary, sufficient action to protect the safety, health and well-being of all children residing in the Jackson home."

Katz, who represents about 700 DYFS employees in South Jersey, said she had been "a failure of the community at large. There are many members of the community that surrounded these children that saved them repeatedly. Some of the workers that were fired never saw the children at all."

Two of the workers had no direct contact with the family since 2000, officials said. Another worker had not seen the family since 2001.

Of the nine employees targeted for termination, two are district officers and are retaining their own lawyers.

The caseworker who had the most visits in the Jackson home also has her own attorney.

The union is representing two caseworkers, one licensing inspector, one foster care worker, and two front-line supervisors.

"They're either incompetent, uncaring, or they lied," Gwendolyn Harris, commissioner of the state Department of Human Services, said Monday, adding that "any reasonable person" would have recognized something wrong with the brothers.

Paul Alexander, assistant to the president of Local 1034, who represents five of the nine, said the state terminated "anyone whose 0 T tm2w8.69srp, os8 - l6 0 Tdhj 23 0 Td (som tmB of the co8," GweC 0 x, unch Tdhj 23 0 Td (

Alexander said he met yesterday with about 100 DYFS workers in ~~Camden~~ and found them "outraged. They feel betrayed."

Nancy Parello, a spokeswoman for the Association for Children of ~~New~~ Jersey, a child-advocacy group, said yesterday

Jacksons lived for more than a decade.

Neighbors and fellow church members never challenged the parents' claims that the boys suffered from eating disorders. Town code inspectors visited the house in July, but either didn't notice the boys or question their condition.

The boys also escaped scrutiny from the local school district because a Jackson claimed to be teaching them at home. New Jersey does not regulate home-school instruction or monitor families that practice it. State officials have said the case of the Jackson boys may now force the state to become much more vigilant in its monitoring of home-schooled children.

"We want to know: Is there anything we should have been doing to avoid this happen?" Collingswood Mayor James Maley said yesterday. "We want to know what else we could have done."

Last night, about 200 residents attended a Collingswood town forum with the mayor and borough commissioners to discuss the case and how they might be able to prevent such neglect in the future. "I think I speak for all of us in saying that we're just simply distraught," Maley said.

He added that borough officials have received a flurry of calls from people offering to help, including actress Rosie O'Donnell, and members of the New York City Fire Department who wanted to know if the boys would be able to ride on a firetruck in the Thanksgiving parade. "We have simply been inundated with people all over," Maley said.

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

At a church, collective soul-searching

Pastor wrestles with 'horrifying' details

BY ANA M. ALAYA AND MARY JO PATTERSON Star-Ledger Staff October 30, 2003

At Sunday worship, the large family of Raymond and Vanessa Jacksons sat in the front two rows.

Raymond, known for his lovely deep bass, swayed when he sang. Vanessa sat quiet and motherly. Except for wizened Bruce, an unusually solemn boy, the children looked happy, even "joyous." When their minister greeted them, his heart swelled with love.

"I really appreciated their apparent willingness to adopt children when few people wanted," Harry L. Thomas Jr., pastor of the Come Alive New Testament Church, wrote in a statement issued yesterday, revealing confusion and doubts about the parents. The couple has apologized for starving Bruce and three other adopted sons.

Up until yesterday, the pastor, a charismatic figure and an outspoken voice in the shocking family drama, had seemed a fortress of certainty. Earlier this week he told a reporter he "did not believe" reports that the boys were so hungry they had taken to gnawing windowsills.

Now, like some others in the Medford, Burlington County church, he was expressing doubts about his ability to discern the truth, to distinguish between reality and appearances. "Tonight for the first time I have been able to read the news coverage. What I read was truly horrifying," the shaken pastor wrote.

"If true, how could so many hundreds of people been fooled for so long?" asked Thomas, 60, a guitar-playing former radio and TV preacher who has led the church for 20 years. He is also president of a company that produces Christian rock concerts and festivals.

Landis, who knows the Jacksons, said he is now "haunted" by the reflection of the first time he saw Bruce.

"I remember thinking, 'Oh, my goodness, what has happened?' He looked severely deformed," he said. "I even asked about it, and I was told 'This family brings in crack babies.'"

But not everyone was soul-searching yesterday. Some people remain certain that the Jacksons had done no wrong.

Wendy Lowry, a former parishioner who knows the family intimately, said it's "impossible" for them to have harmed their kids. About 15 years ago, when she was in a family crisis, the Jacksons took her in.

"It seems to me that the Jacksons are being scapegoated for the problems of the DYFS system," Lowry, who recently moved to Cedar Park, Texas, said by telephone. "I don't think law enforcement is digging deep."

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

Corrections October 30, 2003

A front-page story Tuesday about the nine workers removed from the state Division of Youth and Family Services described them erroneously as social workers. Those who were notified that they were being fired were three caseworkers, one foster home evaluator, a licensing inspector, supervisors and two managers. DYFS does not require all its staff to be licensed social workers.

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

5:72) 31-OCT-2003 21:54 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

Report: Jackson home `nurturing'

DYFS form used in June assessment found to be flawed by panel of experts

By KAREN KENNEDY-HALL Courier-Post Staff October 31, 2003

The Collingswood home of Raymond and Vanessa Jackson where four adopted boys were found starved was considered a nurturing environment, a June safety assessment report said.

The assessment, obtained by the Courier-Post, also said the adopted son suffered from bulimia.

The names of two employees suspended in the case are hand-printed in the report under the heading "present for conference."

Officials with the Department of Youth and Family Services only confirmed that caseworker Frances Ransome and supervisor Jodi Patton were employees and verified their positions.

Patton, when contacted at her Egg Harbor City home, refused comment. Ransome couldn't be reached for comment.

Seven other DYFS employees also are facing termination.

The form's answers indicate that all the children were treated fairly and got along.

"Breanna said when she does something wrong she will have a privilege taken away. She said that is how all of them get punished."

The form also included questions on medical information and housekeeping standards. It is unclear if the worker deemed the environment safe, although the writer said adoption was recommended.

The list of people living in the home included the Jacksons' biological children, Larae, 21, Vernee, 19, Jere, 20, and Raymond II, 18.

Adopted children included Bruce, 18, Keith, 12, Keziah, 11, Tyrone, 8, and Jacee, 4.

There was no mention of 10-year-old Michael, who with Bruce, Tyrone, and Keith, was found nearly starved.

None had special care needs except Bruce, who has "an eating disorder. In depression, he never developed fully physically or mentally from being bulimic (his) whole life," the assessment report noted.

Jere was listed as being mentally handicapped.

The report said the Jacksons, married for 30 years, had a "very loving, supportive relationship. They have had five children included Bruce, 18, Keith, 12, Keziah, 11, and Tyrone, 8. He never developed fully

BY ANA M. ALAYA, JUDITH LUCAS AND JOHN P. MARTIN Star-Ledger Staff

The Collingswood parents accused of starving their adopted sons publicly lashed back yesterday, telling their minister in jailhouse interviews that they can prove their innocence.

"The entire family was fed several times each day, every day," Ray Jackson said, according to statements released by the minister, Harry Thomas. "Every month a social worker would come and check on the family. In fact, they would interview all the children."

Thomas said Vanessa Jackson named doctors and dentists who should help explain why the four boys, ages 9 to 19, were so severely underdeveloped, had rotted teeth or needed to be home schooled.

The boys each weighed less than 50 pounds after police found them in Bruce, searching for food in a neighbor's garbage can three weeks ago. Authorities said the boys were fed a sparse diet that included oatmeal or pancake batter,

Cecilia Zalkind, executive director of the Association for Children in New Jersey, a child-advocacy group, called the federal committee investigation unprecedented.

"I can't think of a time in my experience when there has been a federal investigation like this," said Zalkind, who worked for DYFS in the 1970s and has been with the advocacy group since 1984. "I think it speaks to how dysfunctional this system has been."

DYFS is seeking to fire nine workers, all of whom are suspended pending investigation. The Camden County Prosecutor's Office and the Collingswood Police Department are conducting a criminal investigation to determine whether DYFS employees violated laws.

Union leaders representing six of the suspended workers expressed surprise when told of the new federal review, saying none of their members had been called to testify.

But the picture that is emerging is more nuanced, eccentric and confusing than the caricature of negligent or uncaring parents leaving terribly abused children in their wake. Narrowly drawn laws and an over-weighted bureaucracy allowed the Jacksons, for whatever reason, to leave the horribly malnourished children for years with no oversight or outside help.

The family existed in a system in which state adoption law allowed couples to receive \$30,000 in annual stipends for doing little more than writing a letter certifying that their adopted children were still in their home.

Similarly, although the Jacksons said the children were being schooled at home, New Jersey law demands no proof that home-schooled children are receiving an education — not even annual tests or evidence that they are reading books or doing schoolwork.

And, the tricky task of evaluating the Jacksons, through the tools that were allowable, fell to a 29-year-old woman in her first full year as a social worker. She came from an office that was suspended in 2002 for failing to do adequate adoption investigations, and she herself had nearly tripled the number of cases that she should have had. Perhaps as a result, even the most basic questions were not asked.

"I am not making excuses," said Paul Alexander, assistant president of the union, Local 1034 of the Communications Workers of America, that is helping to advocate for the nine state child welfare workers terminated for their involvement with the Jackson case, "but this was the woman who was doing double duty. If she had had more time maybe she could have fleshed out these problems."

Much remains unclear about life in the three-story gold-colored house at 318 White Horse Pike that has been the Jacksons' home for seven years. But already it is becoming clear that the house with the perky plants in the flower bed did not easily give up its secrets to the prying eye.

Hard against Route 130 on the western edge of Collingswood, the house is part of a small cluster of private homes in a section of this working-class town that is more commercial than residential.

Hidden Behind the Blinds

Even on the sunniest, warmest days, a neighbor, Peter DiMatteo, said, the Jacksons always seemed to have the blinds and drapes closed.

Inside, by all accounts, their home was busy and packed, with four

abuse. Officials from the division say, however, that she saw no reason to doubt the family's explanation that the child had an eating disorder.

Other caseworkers say that this is entirely believable and point out that they would not have had the boys' files to double-check whether this was true or not. The boys, after all, had been legally adopted and were therefore beyond the scrutiny of child welfare officials, as the couple's biological children were.

Under New Jersey law, the schools were not in a position to help.

When the Jacksons first took Bruce in, for example, he was enrolled in special education classes. Soon after he was adopted in 1995, and legally theirs free of state supervision, the Jacksons began saying they were home-schooling him, though it remains unclear what kind of education, if any, he received at home. It was a pattern repeated with each boy but not with the girls.

As it turns out, New Jersey is one of 23 states requiring parents who home-school to do no more than send letters of intent to the local school boards or do nothing at all. Beyond this letter, New Jersey does not require parents to file curriculum or to do follow-up testing to make sure their children are keeping pace with their peers as many states, including New York, do.

"If someone wants to home-school a child, they can just home-school them," said Richard Vespucci, a spokesman for the New Jersey Department of Education. "It is a matter between the family and the local school board. The same hands-off policies apply for children with disabilities and handicaps, even if parents have no training for dealing with students with special needs.

"In this case it is a shame," said Jess McDonald, co-director for Fostering Results, a nonprofit advocacy group for foster children, and former director of the Illinois Department of Children of Family Services. "Education is the one universal system that could have been a check on these kids."

Copyright 2003 The New York Times Company

Newark Star Ledger Editorial Wednesday, October 29, 2003

Why trust DYFS?

It is a deceptively happy portrait of Raymond and Vanessa Jackson's family. But a close examination reveals something deeply disturbing.

In a photo taken just this month, the boys the couple adopted appear severely stunted. No one would guess their ages, from 9 to 19, or that the little one with the haunted look in the center right could possibly be 19.

The four were suffering from malnutrition, essentially starving in view of relatives, church members and state caseworkers who visited the Jackson home more than 30 times in the past two years.

Sometimes people fail to see or refuse to respond to a child's tragedy, one that is happening right before their eyes. Some will not entertain the suspicion that people they think well of might be doing something horribly wrong.

However, whether parents are evil, dangerously ill-informed or merely helpfully stupid about what children need, and whatever other people may say, caseworkers from the Division of Youth and Family Services must have wisdom and the will to recognize children in trouble and rescue them. It is their job to see what others ignore or refuse to see, particularly when DYFS is the agency that filled the house with children.

The extent to which DYFS failed the Jackson children is enough to make one breathless. That it failed in the midst of

the most extensive reform effort ever to hit the agency makes this case all the more frightening.

DYFS has been under a microscope since the death of Faheem Williams,

Conflicting portraits of couple emerge

Questions remain in Collingswood starvation case

By JASONLAUGHLIN

Courier-Post Staff Sunday

November 2, 2003

COLLINGSWOOD

Loving parents overwhelmed by money problems? Or sadists who covered

The motives of Raymond and Vanessa Jackson remain a mystery even after of steady revelations about the life of the four adopted boys they accused of starving.

The scene described by investigators during an Oct. 25 news conference was a horrific one: An emaciated boy digging through garbage and eating pieces of wall for sustenance. Young people so malnourished their growth

Some child advocates called it the worst case of child abuse they'd seen.

The four boys, two of them teenagers, had a combined weight of 100 lbs. Bruce, 19, weighed 45 pounds. Keith, 14, weighed 40 pounds. Tyrone, 10, weighed 28 pounds. Michael, 9, weighed 23 pounds. All agreed with severe malnutrition.

They had rotting teeth and lice. They hadn't visited a doctor in five years. They hadn't been fed properly for five years.

Investigators say hunger drove the children to eat pieces of wall and

Camden County Prosecutor Vincenzo Sarubbi as acid reflux. The DYFS reports also report that Bruce suffered depression.

The Jacksons had convinced the four children they had eating disorders, according to Sarubbi. Doctors found no evidence of any eating disorder disease or genetic defects that could explain the children's small bodies, authorities said.

Neighbors seemed to notice some of the Jackson children looked healthy. Next-door neighbor Peter DiMattia even wondered if the children were suffering from AIDS.

They never seemed to have time to play.

According to Thomas, though, quite the opposite was true. He described the children as joyful, and said they were the first to sign up for church talent contests. They usually performed a hip-hop song and danced around, he said.

The children were home-schooled, though investigators have said there was no sign of educational books in the home.

The family seemed to constantly be adopting children, and DYFS watched the Jacksons for years. The Jacksons took in Bruce in 1991 and adopted him five years later. They steadily increased the size of the family through adoption five more times in subsequent years.

DYFS social workers made 38 visits to the home in four years, authorities said.

During one of those visits, while power was off in the home, a caseworker knelt with the family and prayed for relief, authorities said. But she never reported any sign of abuse and would have soon approved a 10-year-old foster girl for adoption. The caseworker is under investigation by the prosecutor's office and could face charges of official misconduct.

The Jacksons lost electric power this year after not paying bills, records show the family's financial situation had been deteriorating for years.

Raymond Jackson was a financial planner contracted by Primerica, but his business had plummeted. The family defaulted on payments for time shares they owned in Williamsburg, Va., and the Poconos.

In 1998 a debt-collection agency, New Century Financial Services Cedar Knoll, filed a lawsuit against the family in Camden County Superior Court's small claims court. That case concluded in January of this year, a judge ordered the Jacksons to pay \$4,667.28 to the collection agency. New Century's confidentiality policy prohibited them from disclosing the origin of the debt.

Collingswood charities brought boxes of food to the house during holidays starting five years ago, said Joel Shannon of the Collingswood Inter Church Food Pantry.

This year, things got worse for the family. Raymond Jackson earned almost no income. Vanessa Jackson didn't work at all. They couldn't pay bills and their home in the 300 block of the White Horse Pike lost electricity from June 18 to Oct. 6, and gas service from Sept. 8 to Oct. 6. The family also owed \$9,000 in back rent on their home, where they received government housing subsidies.

"I told them, 'You're behind in your rent. I know you must be getting money for all these kids,' " said landlord John Andrews. "And Vanessa said, 'It's not much money at all.' Shame on me, I believed her."

Andrews called the pastor at Come Alive! about the rent he was owed by the Jacksons. The church paid \$1,900 to PSE&G to get power restored to the Jackson home, and reached an agreement Oct. 6 with Andrews to pay \$500 a month for the rent, the pastor said.

A few days later, on Oct. 10, Michael Byrd heard Bruce Jackson in the back behind his home on the White Horse Pike.

At first he thought the clamor was made by an animal. As he made out a human form in the darkness, he thought it might have been a homeless man. He was shocked to find a pale, thin, and dirty child who appeared to be a child.

"When he talked, you could see every bone in his face moving," Raymond remembered.

Jackson gave police his name, but couldn't form coherent sentences. He could not even tell them where he lived.

When Raymond Jackson reported his son missing later that day, Kingswood police searched the home and found a

and a year before they adopted him.

congressional subcommittee will hold a hearing on the case this week.

Renee Jackson said she lived with her parents at their three-story home until 2001. She said her parents "did nothing wrong," and she said all the children ate regularly and were treated equally. The family loved to watch the Food Network, and to munch popcorn while watching movies with Raymond Jackson.

"Sometimes we would have a sundae party, and we would sit around the table with ice cream," Renee Jackson said.

She also said the children had regular medical checkups, and that she was taken to a specialist for gastrointestinal problems. She could not recall the names of the doctors who treated the children.

Thomas, the pastor, said he hopes to raise enough money for the couple's private attorneys and bail next week. He said one donor has given \$3,000 to the defense fund. He said he gave \$100 himself but plans to contribute more.

CS10 3699 43212 16 (Joh 0 Td scn 1 CS699 4

Thomas. They have established a Web site, savethejacksons.org, in which the minister says the real abuse is being perpetrated by police, prosecutors and DYFS. Thomas also has a blog in which he says Bruce is lying.

The Jacksons arrived at the church parking lot around 10 a.m. yesterday in a gray Land Rover, with Thomas behind the wheel. Four of the couple's five adult biological children burst through the church's double doors and ran outside, shrieking and wrapping their arms around their parents.

Later, Thomas vowed to fight for the return of the four boys and three children who lived with the Jacksons.

"There are seven kids that need to be reunited with their families, and I want to bring them home. Bring them home," he told the congregation. "We believe that is going to happen. I feel like they have been kidnapped."

Thomas put up \$5,000 cash and his house in Medford to secure the couple's release. An unidentified friend of the family also put up \$5,000, and Thomas agreed to pay an additional \$10,000 over the next six months.

Reporters and photographers were permitted inside the church yesterday, but the Jacksons did not speak to the media.

Tim Landis, a business associate of the pastor, said he had a special, exclusive with Dan Rather and '60 Minutes II' on the Jacksons' behalf. The couple will tell their story on the Nov. 12 broadcast, he said.

"They're hoping the program will show (their) side of the story," Landis said. "I feel that a guilty person would not want Dan Rather to interview him. They will expose this as the worst case of prosecutive injustice ever."

Landis said the couple, unemployed and in debt, is not being paid for the appearance.

During yesterday's church service, both Vanessa and Raymond Jacksons addressed members of the congregation, turning to face them from their customary seats in the front row.

"I would just like to thank everybody for their prayers," Vanessa Jackson said.

Then her husband, teary-eyed, thanked the congregation. Though she said she kept his spirits up while he was in jail, he said.

"I would see your faces when I prayed, and it would encourage me to keep holding on," he said. "People did not want to be like us. There was a lot of hatred out there. The Lord spoke to us. He said to forgive, forgive from my heart."

Thomas also toned down his criticism of authorities.

"We are not bitter against the prosecutor, against DYFS, against anyone," he said as the 90-minute service drew to a close. "We just want the truth to shine through, and we are going to fight hard for the truth."

Later, Thomas clarified his thoughts.

"Bruce has eaten wallboard. There is no doubt about that," he said. "I did not know that before they adopted him. They thought they could make a difference. I believe in them. I believe they are innocent."

Thomas said his church is providing the Jackson family with food, money and shelter. They are not returning to their rented home in Collingswood because they do not believe it is safe there.

DYFS removed the four boys from the Jacksons' home on Oct. 10 after a neighbor found Bruce going through a neighbor's trash can in search of food.

Two weeks later, Vanessa and Raymond Jackson were arrested on charges of child abuse. Camden County Prosecutor Vincent P. Sarubbi called the boys' treatment "the most horrible case we have ever encountered in our child abuse unit."

"The children were extremely emaciated," he said. "You could see their ribs. They had distended bellies. Their shoulder blades were sticking out from their bodies. They actually looked like children you'd see from third-world countries on television commercials. What happened was an absolute disgrace."

At first, Thomas called the charges incredible, but wavered a few days after learning that the boys were gaining weight while in the care of others.

Then, after speaking to the Jacksons in jail, Thomas leaped to their defense and denounced the prosecutor and child-welfare officials.

The Web site the church has established was set up to collect funds for this family. As of last night, though, the chatroom had attracted opponents as well as supporters.

"I have to say these people ought to be hung out to dry," one person

still in Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center in Camden. A female foster child in the Jackson household is in another foster home..

Come Alive's 10:30 a.m. service began late because of the reunion held inside the modern sanctuary, on Old Marlton Road, was joyous. After Communion, the Rev. Harry Thomas invited the couple forward to speak.

"I would just like to thank everyone for their prayers," Vanessa Jackson said quietly, Jere clinging to her arm.

Raymond Jackson was next, speaking in a calm, low voice.

"I want you to know your love and your prayers definitely kept us when we were in the jail," he said. "I saw your faces when I'd pray. It would keep me. I'd keep holding on."

Alluding to conditions in jail, he said that "there were people that didn't really want to like us. There was a lot of hatred there."

And while Tim Landis, a spokesman for the church and the family, only harsh words and derision for authorities, particularly the Camden County Prosecutor's Office, Raymond Jackson was calm.

"The Lord told me to forgive. I forgive from my heart. As Jesus said the cross: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,' " he said.

Thomas approached him then, urging him to do what he had done many Sundays - sing a solo. Raymond Jackson did so, in a rich, lovely voice.

"Jesus, you're the center... ," he sang. "You're the heart of my commitment and hope for all I do."

After the Jacksons spoke, Thomas took the microphone.

"There are seven kids that need to be reunited with their family, and we got to keep praying," he said. "We believe

middle of the night, is troubled, he said.

"Bruce says he was not allowed to go to church. We have records that he was here. We know that he doesn't always tell the truth, and that there are some severe problems there," Landis said, adding that he did not know specifically what disorders or conditions Bruce Jackson had.

After the service, friends streamed over to the Jacksons' spot on the

Fresh from a warm embrace with Vanessa, a beaming Harriet Richardson joined the scene. She has known the family for 15 years, she said. Raymond sang at her daughter's wedding, and she considers him a friend.

She does not believe the couple starved their sons, she said.

"My grandchildren interact with their children," she said. "How could he be deceived for so long? I don't believe that."

Thomas agreed, saying he knew the church had to take up the Jacksons'

"Why wasn't all that set up? Ordinary parents do not generally ~~know~~ these things," she said.

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

5:77) 05-NOV-2003 07:50 [JohSearight \(searigh\)](#)

Dentist denies treating Jackson son

Family cited medical professionals who saw malnourished kids

BY JUDITH LUCAS AND MARY JO PATTERSON November 05, 2003 Star-Ledger Staff

A Pennsauken dentist who allegedly treated Bruce Jackson, the emaciated 10-year-old at the center of New Jersey's latest child abuse scandal, yesterday denied ever caring for the youth.

"I never saw him. Definitely not. I don't know why they are naming me," Anthony Ermocida said after examining office records going back to 1994. "Something like that I would have remembered."

However, Ermocida said his office did treat Bruce's mother, Vanessa Jackson, on May 2, 1995. "They probably remember the name and just mentioned me," the dentist said.

The Camden County Prosecutor's Office has accused Vanessa Jackson and her husband, Raymond, of starving and neglecting Bruce and three other adopted sons, as well as withholding medical care.

When police removed them from their Collingswood home Oct. 10, the youngest boy, age 9, weighed 23 pounds; Bruce weighed 45 pounds. The parents, foster parents for the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services, were jailed two weeks later.

Bruce Jackson, hospitalized since police found him scavenging for food in a neighbor's garbage can, is gaining weight rapidly. As of yesterday, he weighed 63 pounds, according to Kevin Ryan, the state child advocate.

Doctors consulting on his case have told state child welfare officials with proper nutrition and constant monitoring, the 19-year-old -- only 4 feet tall -- could put on a fair amount of height. Because of his emaciation, he has the appearance of a child half his age.

Three weeks after he and his brothers were taken from their parents, officials are still combing through records to construct a picture of their day-to-day lives.

One official familiar with the case said the inquiry shows that although the family had access to health care through the Medicaid program, Medicaid paid for only one routine medical visit -- for one of the boys -- about four years ago.

Yet multiple medical visits were logged for a 10-year-old foster daughter whom the Jacksons were planning to adopt, the source said, adding mystery to one of the most puzzling aspects of the case. That girl and other adopted daughters were found to be well-nourished.

Last Friday the Jacksons and their minister, the Rev. Harry Thomas Medford, vigorously rebutted the allegations against the couple on a Web site set up by their church, Come Alive New Testament Church, saying Bruce had a chronic eating disorder and psychological problems. Soon thereafter, he was bailed the couple out of jail.

In "direct quotes" gathered by the pastor and posted on the Web site, Jackson ticked off the names of various medical specialists who treated her sons, including a "dentist named Dr. Amocida at the Brown Road Medical." Her husband also said "numerous doctors" treated the boys.

As of yesterday, however, the Jacksons' church said it was pulling back its public relations campaign.

The Web site, savethejacksons-.org, had been partially dismantled. Thomas declared he would no longer grant media

interviews. And the church, through a spokesman, announced that it had retained the services of a lawyer who will represent the Jacksons free of charge.

"From now on, the church position is, we're going to be in the background. People hate us enough," said the spokesman Tim Landis, a business partner of the minister and president of a Lancaster, Pa., radio station. "It's in the hands of the attorneys now."

Earlier this week, Landis negotiated a deal between the Jacksons and CBS for them to tell their story on a news show Nov. 14.

One of the elements deleted from the church's Web site was a chat room to register words of encouragement for the Jacksons, it also had become a lightning rod for hate, Landis said. People had posted messages about "Pastor Harry," he said.

Also missing were the "direct quotes" Thomas collected from Vanessa Jackson during a visit to the Camden County Jail last Friday.

Family photos remain on the site, including one of Bruce seated at a restaurant table. So does a fund-raising page. "100% of the funds will go directly towards meeting the legal, medical and living expenses of this wonderful family," it states.

In the deleted portion in which Vanessa Jackson mentioned the name of a neuro-specialist in Burlington named "Dr. Vance" treated her sons.

No physician by that name could be located.

Mrs. Jackson also said her sons were treated by "Dr. Doria," a psychologist in Westmont.

The Star-Ledger located a psychiatrist named Marie Eleanora Doria who formerly worked in Westmont, a section of Haddon Township. She said did not remember the family.

"I just read it in the newspaper," Doria said. "I don't have any other

By RICHARD LEZIN JONES NY Times

November 6, 2003

WASHINGTON, Nov. 5 — New Jersey's embattled child welfare agency will face a new level of scrutiny on Thursday as federal lawmakers hold a Congressional hearing on the case of four boys who the authorities said starved by their adoptive parents.

But even as they welcomed federal attention to children's issues, child welfare advocacy groups wondered what the hearing might mean for the future of federal programs, like the adoption subsidies that the parents in the starvation case were receiving.

The hearing, to be held by the Human Resources Subcommittee of the Ways and Means Committee, was called by Representative Wally Herger, Republican from California. The subcommittee, led by Mr. Herger, plays a large role in overseeing the roughly \$7 billion in federal money given to child welfare agencies across the country. For the 2002 fiscal year, New Jersey received about \$100 million from one such federal program, known by its place in the Social Security Act as Title IV-E. About a quarter of that money was meant solely for adoption assistance costs.

The state twice failed federal audits that it was required to pass to receive the funds, and New Jersey was penalized \$6 million for lapses like failing to adequately document attempts to move children to foster care and allowing

Star-Ledger

November 06, 2003

All eyes missed the glaring clues in Jackson case

Starving boys spur questions from the state and Congress

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO, JUDITH LUCAS AND JOHN P. MARTIN

Health inspectors discovered earlier this year there was no electricity in the house that Vanessa and Raymond Jackson shared with their adopted children, but failed to alert any agencies or inquire about the children's conditions.

The Collingswood inspectors visited the family's house three times between July and September, weeks before the Jacksons were accused of starving their four adopted sons. They cited the Jacksons for creating high grass, but only scrawled a note about the lack of electricity on the back of one report.

The lack of power wasn't a housing violation -- "wasn't part of their," Mayor James Maley said yesterday.

Maley, acknowledging that such an excuse rings hollow, pledged yesterday to train all municipal workers who visit homes to recognize signs of neglect or abuse among children.

"We are dealing with issues much larger than the family," he said.

The revelation comes as lawmakers in Washington open a hearing into the Jackson case. The human resources subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee is expected to question a half-dozen people who might help them answer lingering questions: What were the signs that misled them and why?

"The members want to know what is going on, why the system broke down and what lessons it teaches us," said a committee aide.

The roster of witnesses reflects key figures in a case that has shaken the state's troubled child welfare system and drawn national attention for almost three weeks.

State and local officials have been investigating the Jackson family since last month when Bruce, the 19-year-old adopted boy, was found rummaging for food in a neighbor's garbage. He weighed 45 pounds, his younger brothers told police that they sometimes were so hungry that they gnawed on windowsills and wallboard.

Testifying will be Human Services Commissioner Colleen Maguire, who has

inappropriately.

Therapists disagree sharply about when to diagnose and how to treat the disorder.

Mercer, the Stockton psychologist, has become an ardent critic of a controversial treatment called attachment therapy.

Four emaciated Collingswood brothers have gained about half a pound since police removed them from their parents' home on Oct. 10, a senior state official said yesterday.

The eldest, Bruce Jackson, 19, weighed 45 pounds when he entered the hospital. He now weighs at least 63 pounds.

His three adopted brothers - ages 9, 10 and 14 - each weighed less than 50 pounds. They have since gained about 10 pounds each, officials said.

New Jersey's child advocate, Kevin Ryan, said he did not know the cause of the brothers' malnourishment, which prosecutors have labeled a crime against the parents Raymond and Vanessa Jackson. But "the doctors tell me the reason they are now growing is because they are simply being fed."

In an interview, Ryan criticized suggestions from the family and pastor that Bruce Jackson or others had fabricated stories that the brothers ate pieces of wall and insulation to survive.

"I think you can discount that this was all some lie that the kids," said Ryan, one of several New Jersey officials scheduled to testify on the matter before a congressional committee today.

"I don't begrudge the advocates' commitment to their friends in a hard but when the advocacy leads to vilification of children on a national stage, I think that's reprehensible," Ryan said. He noted that the brothers' two adopted sisters were healthy.

"I don't think any of us can know what was in Mr. or Mrs. Jackson's heart," he said. "It's hard to reconcile the boy's condition as the girl flourished."

The couple have been charged with starving their four adopted boys. Released Sunday after posting bail, they have denied any wrongdoing, saying through their pastor that the sons suffered from pre-existing medical conditions, including fetal alcohol syndrome.

On her family Web site, Vanessa Jackson also has challenged assertions by authorities that the sons had not seen a doctor in four years. Doctors she cited on the Web site could not be located yesterday, and a state official said the mother had been treated, but not the children.

Ryan, who is reviewing the state's handling of the case, said he "has no evidence" that the brothers had been to a doctor in four years.

He added, "I don't believe there is any doctor in the state of New Jersey who would have seen those boys and would have allowed their condition to go untreated."

At a news conference Oct. 11, Camden County Prosecutor Vincent Sabatelli said that the brothers had lice in their hair, and that one had a hard food object in his stomach.

Three of the brothers were released from a hospital to foster families Oct. 24, the day their parents were arrested. During the brothers' stay, doctors slowly increased their caloric intake, beginning with a liquid diet. By the time they left, they had been treated to regular food, including during a trip to the mall.

Bruce Jackson remains hospitalized. He, too, is eating solid food, including potato chips and tuna, officials have said.

Prosecutors are investigating whether criminal charges are warranted against state Division of Youth and Family Services workers involved in the Jackson case.

Nine DYFS workers have been suspended in the case. A caseworker official said had visited the Jacksons' home at least two dozens times in two years to see their foster daughter has submitted her resignation.

Ryan said he was coordinating interviews with 17 DYFS employees Sabatelli's office, so as not to compromise the

criminal investigation. Records in the case are voluminous, he said. Bruce Jackson's adoption files thousands of pages, Ryan said.

The focus of the case is expected to shift to Capitol Hill this morning as a subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee convenes a hearing.

Scheduled witnesses include Ryan; Sarubbi; Colleen Maguire, deputy commissioner of the state Department of Human Services; Carla Katz, president of the union that represents the suspended caseworkers; Robinson Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights, an advocacy group that has sued DYFS; and the Rev. Harry Thomas, the Jacksons' pastor at Come Alive! New Testament Church in Medford.

Thomas will speak on behalf of Raymond and Vanessa Jackson, who were asked to testify. They did not request a chance to be heard, either, congressional aides said yesterday. They also asked to be interviewed by the committee.

But after calling Polaris Images, the New York company peddling the photos, I had a change of heart.

Each picture costs \$150.

And after saying Polaris would split the fees with the Jacksons, the company rep called back to say he couldn't say where the money would go.

No matter. The Web site implores visitors to donate \$25 to \$250 to pay the "legal, medical and living expenses of this wonderful family."

Selling family photos at inflated rates is one part of the Jackson

So, apparently, is villifying their sick, sticklike son and implying that his imagination is at fault in the starvation case that has nauseated education.

When in doubt...

I'm not a lawyer, but I'm guessing the two who stepped forward to represent Ray and Vanessa Jackson are cringing at the couple's public relations strategy so far.

Generally speaking, if you've been arrested after cops found severely malnourished and underdeveloped adult sons rooting through a neighbor's trash for food, it's probably not the best idea to tell the world he has caused his own horrific problems.

But that's exactly what Ray and Vanessa Jackson, assisted by family members and their spiritual adviser, the Rev. Harry Thomas of the Community Alive! New Testament Church in Medford, have done.

Their message?

That 19 year-old Bruce Jackson - who weighed just 45 pounds and stood 4 feet when police found him - is really a big fat liar.

That's the theme of the seven-page statement Thomas released under the headline, "The Worst Case of Abuse This Area Has Ever Seen!"

He meant the abuse against Mr. and Mrs. Jackson's reputations. Blatant mistreatment of their four adopted sons who, collectively, weighed just 136 pounds when police whisked them to a hospital.

The brothers allegedly survived on dry pancake batter and peanut butter their parents and other siblings ate heartily.

Sometimes, the brothers were so hungry they supposedly chewed walls for nourishment.

... villify the victim

Thomas, he of faith, doesn't buy it.

Instead, the pastor who claims devotion to the family offers up a host of named supporters to discredit Bruce and his younger brothers.

My favorite? The Holocaust survivor who Thomas says is "willing to testify that the family has eaten numerous times in her home."

Even worse than the pastor's criticism of the young, gravely ill members of his flock is the Jacksons' decision to throw their sickly son to the lions.

In jailhouse interviews with their pastor, the couple blamed ~~the~~ troubles on Bruce's lies and his eating disorders and medical problems ~~ss~~ such as bulimia and acid reflux.

Despite prosecutors' insistence that the boys hadn't seen a doctor ~~years~~, the couple swear they have medical records prove otherwise.

But, so far, efforts to find the doctors they named have proved futile.

And that dentist who Vanessa Jackson says can prove acid reflux ~~causes~~ causes teeth to rot?

He said he had never treated the boy.

Thankfully, the attorneys put an end to the loving couple's ~~scam~~ scam campaign.

But the lawyers couldn't stop the man of God from continuing ~~his~~ his crusade on behalf of the Jacksons.

Make sure to catch him on 60 Minutes II next week, trying to convince ~~the~~ the country there's any good reason a 19-year-old young man would ever weigh less than a 20-inch TV set.

Monica Yant Kinney writes Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. Contact ~~856-779-3914~~ 856-779-3914 or myant@phillynews.com.

© 2003 Philadelphia Inquirer and wire service sources. All Rights ~~is~~ reserved.

5:80) 06-NOV-2003 16:23 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

Here is the first news report on the congressional hearing today ~~on~~ on the Jackson case and New Jersey's child welfare crisis.

Acting swiftly, the Ways and Means subcommittee on human resources held a hearing just two weeks after police arrested the Jacksons and charged them with endangering their four adopted sons.

The boys, ages 9 to 19, each stood no more than 4 feet tall and weighed no more than 45 pounds when they were found Oct. 10 after the oldest was found foraging through a neighbor's trash for food.

Also in the Jackson household was a foster child who was visited numerous times by the state child protection agency, the Division of Youth and Family Services. State officials say those visits produced no reported problems in the house.

Since Oct. 24, the child protection agency fired nine workers involved in the oversight of the household, and Camden County prosecutors have said charges could be brought against the workers. Carla Katz, president of the union that represents the workers, told the subcommittee that her members need better training and smaller caseloads to do their work effectively.

Camden County Prosecutor Vincent Sarubbi said the four boys have gained about 55 pounds since being taken under state supervision on Oct. 10.

The Rev. Harry L. Thomas Jr., senior pastor at Come Alive! New Testament Church in Medford, N.J., was the only witness who spoke in defense of the Jacksons.

"I'm telling you these people are innocent," he said. "They had the same problems a day like everybody else, and there were serious difficulties with these children they had to deal with."

He said he believes the oldest boy, 19-year-old Bruce, who was discovered foraging, has an eating disorder known as rumination, characterized by the regurgitation and rechewing of partially digested food.

He said Bruce has made "numerous false accusations" about the family. He asked, "How many of us in this room would have taken on a project like Bruce?"

Thomas' impassioned defense prompted angry exchanges with lawmakers and another witness, Kevin Ryan, New Jersey's newly appointed child advocate.

"The public vilification of these boys, characterizing any one of them as a liar, and referring to them as a 'project,' is despicable, and I think it needs to stop," Ryan said.

Rep. Rob Andrews, D-Haddon Heights, whose district includes Collingswood, said Congress should evaluate whether the federal government can better oversee state programs for child welfare.

"I'm not in favor of federalizing all these situations, but it strikes me that someone may have to watch the watchers," Andrews said.

Chairman Wally Herger, R-Calif., said the subcommittee will hold additional hearings on policy implications of the case. "Nearly every one of our states has witnessed high-profile tragedies in which vulnerable children have been horrifically abused, neglected and even killed," Herger said.

New Jersey's child protection agency has drawn ample criticism throughout the years. Children's Rights, a nonprofit advocacy group, filed a class-action lawsuit against the state in 1999 to force reforms.

The state settled that lawsuit earlier this year. As part of the agreement, the state reviewed all child welfare cases, hired 366 more employees for the family services division, and gave it \$30 million in emergency aid.

Colleen Maguire, deputy commissioner for child services in the New Jersey Department of Human Services, said New Jersey still has a lot of reforming to do, including setting standards for care, dealing with massive caseloads of social workers and improving training, supervision and accountability.

She urged Congress to commit additional money to help states deal with child abuse and neglect.

On the Net:

House Ways and Means Committee <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/>

Copyright 2003 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

5:81) 07-NOV-2003 07:03 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

Prosecutor Says Medical Data Points to 4 Boys' Starvation

By RICHARD LEZIN JONES NY Times November 7, 2003

WASHINGTON, Nov. 6 — A New Jersey prosecutor said at a Congressional hearing on Thursday that four boys were found severely malnourished. On October had rapidly gained several pounds after their discovery. He said development bolstered his charge that they had been intentionally malnourished.

The 2012-11-07 09:42:00 AM > BDC ()Tj EMC -26.77 -2 6641 1

wiN1Tj 29.212 0t Ayae Inourisheurir monthsTj. He .Aentvis(sText<FEFF00A0>> BDC ()Tj EMC -26.77 -2 6641 1

By Kristen A. Graham Inquirer Staff Writer Nov. 07, 2003

WASHINGTON - In what some members of Congress called the most disturbing hearing they have ever witnessed, the federal government yesterday began its investigation into the case of the Collingswood couple accused of starving their

Marcia Robinson Lowry, executive director of a children's advocacy group that recently settled a lawsuit against New Jersey, implored the House to create minimum standards for child welfare.

"We've given states the chance to protect families. They're not listening, who directs Children's Rights. "It's time for you to step in."

Possible solutions mentioned include requiring annual medical examinations for children whose foster or adoptive parents receive subsidies for their care. The Jacksons received \$30,000 a year for their foster and adopted children.

Testifying in a calm voice, Thomas suggested that the Jacksons had done wrong and that DYFS had dumped needy children on the Jacksons without giving the couple proper education or support.

The pastor also said teachers and doctors who knew the boys had been housed probably would never step forward because they were afraid of the media and prosecutorial scrutiny.

"The family had plenty of food," Thomas said. "They ate three meals a day. They didn't need assistance."

But it was clear that the family had fallen on hard times and primarily on the \$30,000. Just before the brothers were removed from the home, Come Alive stepped in to have the family's electricity reestablished after three months of no power. The family also owed \$9,000 in rent.

"Believe me, folks, these people are not monsters," Thomas said.

"All that's missing are the four loaves and seven fishes," shouted Rep. Pete Stark (D., Calif.).

Said Rep. Donald Payne (D., N.J.): "It incenses me that a person would sit there and defend people that are wrong. There's no question - they're wrong. These children are victims."

After the hearing, Herger said the subcommittee would hold hearings on the case, specifically examining what impact it might have on child-welfare policy around the country.

Wading through a sea of cameras and reporters, Thomas and Tim Woods has been serving as the media spokesman for Come Alive and the family led some reporters to a television to view a video of the family dancing at a church banquet.

In the video, Raymond Jackson introduces his children, including "Bustin' Bad Bruce," and speaks briefly to the congregation.

"My mother brought me up in the right way," he says on the tape. "Right and narrow way."

Then upbeat Christian hip-hop begins, and the family begins dancing. In the middle, on the right, is a startling sight: "M.J.," age 9. In stature, he could easily pass for a toddler.

© 2003 Philadelphia Inquirer and wire service sources.

S.J. starvation case outrages lawmakers

House panel promises increased oversight of child welfare system

By KAREN KENNEDY-HALL and LEDYARD KING Courier-Post Staff

WASHINGTON Friday, November 7, 2003

Lawmakers shocked and disgusted by the discovery of four starved boys in South Jersey vowed Thursday to boost federal oversight of the nation's child welfare system.

While acknowledging that other states have similar problems, legislators said they were so repulsed by the Collingswood case - four boys ages 9 to 19 who collectively weighed 136 pounds - that action is necessary.

technology.

The state's move to dismiss social workers in the wake of the Jackson case will hurt recruitment in a field already considered unattractive to many, said Carla Katz, president of the union group that opposes workers' dismissals.

"Reacting to a crisis by firing people indiscriminately encourages the workforce to believe there is no real accountability - there is merely retribution," Katz said.

Camden County Prosecutor Vincent P. Sarubbi said his office is looking whether to charge the DYFS workers.

"We have tens of thousands of documents to look at," he said. It's impossible to say how long it will take before we have some answers."

Thank you for visiting www.courierpostonline.com

5:53) 08-NOV-2003 14:41 [JohSearight \(searigh\)](#)

Warnings of Trouble at New Jersey Adoption Unit

By RICHARD LEZIN JONES and LESLIE KAUFMAN NY Times November 8, 2003

In Sept. 14, 2000, nine New Jersey child welfare workers based in the southern part of the state met to discuss adoption and foster care. The resulting critique, meant to be confidential, painted a disturbing picture of a staff that did not have enough homes in which to place foster children awaiting adoption. Nor did that staff have the tools to meaningfully evaluate the homes that were available.

"No one knows the foster parents," was one of the stark assessments of the workers, according to state records made public as a result of a court order.

The group's discussion that day was far from academic. The results overwhelmed staff and unsafe placements could be dangerous. The year before, for instance, workers had failed to immediately remove an adopted child from the care of a woman whose son was suspected of sexually abusing children in her home.

"I have serious concerns about it," a supervisor wrote of the danger to the child. "If I am reading it correctly, there are still kids in the home— why?"

In another case, a few months later, the state found that a young adoption was living in a group home where other children had been sexually molested. The worker at the home charged with overseeing children and conducting bed checks had been found asleep while on duty.

In both instances, the children who were in jeopardy were being handled by workers in the Southern Adoption Resource Center, one of the half-dozen state-run offices from which workers oversee foster families and complete adoptions for about 1,000 children each year. It was that center that approved the adoption of four boys by the Jacksons of Collingswood, N.J., the couple who have been charged with systematically starving the boys many years.

Although the investigation of Raymond and Vanessa Jackson by prosecutors is continuing, interviews with front-line child welfare workers and state officials, as well as a review of the state's own files, make clear that the Southern Adoption Resource Center, then and now, has significant troubles.

Some workers at the center were found last year to have violated state rules by not documenting interviews with adoptive families and prospective adoptive children and for not making required home visits. They corrected the problems, but state evaluators cited more violations regarding family interviews again this year.

After the discovery of the Jackson children, the state said it would conduct safety assessments on the homes of each of the 1,200 children whose cases are supervised by the southern office.

were found this year in Newark, had been closed even though caseworker never saw Faheem.

"It was closed to close it, not because it had been investigated resolved," Thompson said.

The crushing caseload has led to a "deprofessionalization" of social workers as agencies dumb down the requirements for the job, according to the Child Welfare League of America, a nonprofit agency.

Years of change and the passage of a proposed federal law to fund loans for social workers would be needed to upgrade the DYFS workforce, educator Gelles said. In the meantime, students' breaking down the door, saying we want to go work for DYFS."

© 2003 Philadelphia Inquirer and wire service sources.

Newark Star-Ledger Editorial Tuesday, November 04, 2003

DYFS must be responsible

The Camden County couple charged in the case of their four severely neglected adopted sons say they were teaching their children at home. Police found no textbooks or evidence of a learning program.

That has some people saying the state Division of Youth and Family Services should not allow its families to home-school because the practice makes it easier to hide signs of abuse and neglect. But DYFS already has caseworkers to make certain they are safe at home, whether they are in home school, in private school or are too young to be in school.

Yes, teachers sometimes see problems others miss.

However, the scandal of the Jackson case is that the children already had people specifically assigned to watch over them: the DYFS workers who brought one child after another into the Jackson home for adoption.

Doctors say the Jackson boys had rotten teeth and classic signs of malnutrition. We hope a teacher would notice such things but do not understand how caseworkers who went into that home did not notice otherwise, the family said the boys had eating disorders, DYFS did not make certain they were getting medical help.

Officials say that utilities in the Jackson home had been turned off for weeks, that there were bite marks on the woodwork and that food was often locked up. A classroom teacher might never learn about such a case. A caseworker sent to the home to clear it for adoption or check for a foster child should.

We do have concerns about home schooling, for any child, because New Jersey has no significant regulations on the

"Actually, the symptoms shown in that study would be even more profound with boys like these who are young and come with prior medical issues," said Dr. Susan M. Ice, medical director of Renfrew Center in Philadelphia, which treats severe anorexics and bulimics.

An early experience of starvation may not be the only explanation for parents' claims that Bruce Jackson had strange eating habits. Dr. Walsh pointed to the possibility of an eating disorder called pica. "With pica compulsively consume nonnutritive substances like sand and dirt, even animal droppings and insects.

"Kids with iron deficiency are prone to abnormality, especially if they're not getting enough iron."

"But there was not a time I didn't pray for Bruce," she said.

Principal says she doesn't understand all that's happened to Bruce she last saw him.

Camden County Prosecutor Vincent Sarubbi described Bruce's case as the example of child abuse and neglect he has ever seen. Bruce has become the latest symbol for what ails New Jersey's dysfunctional welfare system.

Bruce has even been called a liar by his adoptive parents. Speaking on the Jacksons' behalf, the family's pastor told a congressional committee investigating the case last week that the boy's eating disorder behavior problems made him "a project" to raise.

Principal and her companion, Joseph, who declined to give his name, say they do not want to be overly judgmental. They are impressed, for instance, that the Jacksons' pastor "would put himself out there" defending them in public, even offering up his home to make the couple's Joseph said.

"The (DYFS) workers must feel bad, too. They're guilty until proven innocent, aren't they?" he said.

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

Jacksons' televised plea: 'We want our children back'

By JASON NARK Courier-Post Staff November 12, 2003

The Collingswood couple accused of starving their four adopted boys for the return of their children during an interview tonight on the CBS program 60 Minutes II.

Raymond and Vanessa Jackson make their first public comments since being arrested last month during a brief interview with Dan Rather.

"I miss my kids a lot," Vanessa Jackson, 48, said in a transcript prepared by CBS.

"We want our children back," added Raymond Jackson, 50.

The couple's four adult biological children and Raymond Jackson's other also spoke with Rather, saying the boys were fed regularly but had severe disorders.

However, a New Jersey official appearing on the show said the boys, 9 to 19, were the victims of abuse.

"I think it's very likely that some of these children would have perished" if officials had not removed them from the Jackson home last month, said state Childhood Advocate Kevin Ryan.

Raymond and Vanessa Jackson are each charged with aggravated child endangering. Authorities also have moved to fire nine employees of the state Division of Youth and Family Services, contending they failed to protect the Jackson children despite repeated visits to the family's home.

Raymond and Vanessa Jackson declined to discuss the charges during the interview. But family members contended the four boys were well-treated.

"We would eat together," said Raymond Jackson Jr., the couple's adult son. "We'd eat breakfast, lunch and dinner and stuff together."

Among comments released in the transcript, daughter Le Rae Jackson said the adopted boys, 19-year-old Bruce, would gorge on food after traumatic events.

Bruce Jackson, who is four feet tall, weighed 45 pounds when a neighbor found him foraging for food in a trash can on Oct. 10.

"Usually, when something extreme happens, he'll probably go and be like, 'I'm upset,'" Le Rae said of Bruce. "Like recently our dog died and it probably upset

charged Oct. 24.

In his interview, Child Advocate Ryan said the boys had distended bellies when they were removed from the home.

"You could see their ribs," he said. "These were boys, really, on the verge of very serious medical problems."

Bruce Jackson remains hospitalized, but the three other boys fast-track care.

While Le Rae Jackson said the boys' physical condition could be blamed on health problems, Ryan noted that the boys have made "dramatic" weight gains since being removed from the home.

Bruce now weighs almost 65 pounds, Ryan told Rather, while the others have gained 16, 14 and 9 pounds, respectively.

Camden County Prosecutor Vincent P. Sarubbui declined to be interviewed for the show but issued a statement Tuesday.

He said three medical experts, including a geneticist, evaluated the Jackson boys and determined their dramatic underdevelopment stemmed from severe malnourishment and inadequate medical care.

"In accordance with attorney ethics, I cannot engage in further discussion, review or analysis, nor can I respond to criticism of the ongoing investigation, no matter how misguided those criticisms may be," Sarubbui said.

Raymond and Vanessa Jackson had originally agreed to be interviewed for 60 Minutes II, then changed their minds on the advice of unnamed, newly acquired attorneys, a family spokesman has said.

CBS spokeswoman Kelli Andrews said the Jacksons changed their minds and met with Rather in New Jersey.

Family members on the show, including daughter Vernee and Raymond's brother, William, also were advised by attorneys not to appear.

"We're doing this interview so we can say stuff that they can't say," Raymond Jr.

Also today, another TV program is taking up the Jackson case.

The John Walsh Show (shown at 1 p.m. on WGTW, Channel 48) will interview with experts and neighbors of the Jacksons, including 37-year-old Michael Byrd, who called police after discovering Bruce peering through his trash can.

Birth parents ache for starved son

Bruce Jackson, later adopted, is part of the N.J. starvation case.

By Kristen A. Graham and Frank Kummer Inquirer Staffers Nov. 12, 2003

His father wants to know why his 19-year-old son was only 4 feet tall, he was found rooting for food in a trash can weighing only 45 pounds.

His mother wants to tell him she loves him and never stopped thinking him.

Reached separately in Camden and Chester yesterday, Bruce Jackson's biological parents say they are sick with the news of what has happened in his life since they lost him more than a decade ago.

He said he and his mother, now dead, had taken Jackson to doctor's hospital for his problems. The child was small but so was his father when young, said Roy, who is 5-foot-6.

"Bruce ate like a horse," Roy said. "He had a good appetite."

But problems kept surfacing. DYFS accused Roy of abusing the boy, allegation he denies.

Principal said that on her last visit with her son, when he was 8, he asked her for food. He was in bad shape, "but not as bad as now," she said.

Eventually, Roy moved to Fayetteville, N.C., taking his son with him. DYFS officials tracked them there and took the child from him.

Roy moved to Philadelphia and took a parenting class in the hope his son would be returned to him. It never happened.

His last contact with him was a visit in 1994.

Bruce came to the Jacksons as a foster child in 1991. The Collings family adopted him in 1996.

Losing contact with her son was devastating, Principal said, but she had no recourse.

"I missed him," she said. "It tore me apart. I didn't care about anything for a while - what I did or where I went."

Principal, who does not work and receives public assistance, said she learned of the case only last week after watching TV news.

Looking at her television, Principal was shaken, she said. One boy looked like her Bruce.

She and her fiance began poring over recent newspapers. She knew Bruce Jackson in the dozens of articles was her son.

"I was upset and angered," she said.

In a news release, CBS News said the Jacksons would insist vigorously on *60 Minutes II*, scheduled to air at 8 tonight, that Bruce and his three adopted brothers were not starved.

But Roy looks at the newspaper clipping that first told him of his life since he left him, and he finds that hard to believe.

"He's 19," his father said incredulously, angrily. "He should be out on his own, not in a hospital."

© 2003 Philadelphia Inquirer and wire service sources.

5:86) /TT1 1s

Caseworkers now average more than 40 cases each - about double the standard set by the Child Welfare League of America.

"Until the state can do better with hiring and retraining qualified staff, there's going to be very little change on the frontlines," said Thompson of Children's Rights. "That's going to jeopardize any system reforms, if the agency continues to have insufficient staffing."

Since the discovery of Faheem Williams' dead body in Newark in January, a child abuse case was closed without his ever having been seen by a caseworker - calls to the agency have swelled and so have case filings. Changes instituted after his death made it more difficult to close cases, leaving workers to keep their eyes on about 60,000 children.

Those watching DYFS expect the agency to complete a preliminary blueprint for changes by next week - in time to fine-tune it before an official submission in January.

But there is more at stake. Without public support for change and the perception that DYFS is on the right path, plans for change could be in jeopardy.

"There are big questions here about public confidence," Ryan said. "One thing that is essential in a reform process is that steps are taken to ensure children are safe and the public ratifies the changes in that."

Although DYFS has undergone one failed effort to change after another over the years, the current process has been held out as the real deal because it is under the watch of a federal judge.

The case of the four malnourished Jackson brothers of Collingswood had an impact. One foster child, a girl, was in the Jackson home under DYFS supervision.

Because the Jackson family not only had been seen by caseworkers but also given a thumbs-up in an emergency safety assessment of all foster homes, questions were raised about the quality of those assessments involving thousands to be redone.

"That did not result in public confidence," Ryan said.

The four brothers were removed from their home after the eldest, Bruce, was found rifling in his neighbor's garbage can on Oct. 10. He was 4 feet tall and weighed 45 pounds, but has since gained some weight. He and his brothers, ages 14 and 10, are under 24-hour medical care. The 9-year-old already lives with a foster family.

A member of the panel of national child welfare experts overseeing state efforts said the Collingswood case might be a temporary setback for agency changes, but it also has added urgency to the cause.

"It helps people understand how it's [DYFS] so broken," said Kathleen Feely of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Cotton, like Feely, said the state could benefit from the problems exposed by the Jackson case.

Still, Cotton said, it has thrown off the momentum that was building in controversies.

"I consider it a slap in the face to social workers, a slap in the face to foster families, and a slap in the face to adoptive parents," Cotton said of the Jackson case, noting that he has been all of those.

One of the inevitable consequences of bad publicity, Ryan said, is the loss of foster families and damage to recruitment efforts for new ones. With the state already suffering from a shortage of foster families and trying to reduce the maximum number of children per home, thousands more are needed, Ryan said.

Despite the fallout over the Collingswood case, Feely urged patience and continued commitment to fixing a deeply flawed agency.

"When you have breakdowns like we've seen in New Jersey in the past, it's a sign that things are very broken," she said. "New Jersey is trying to do a lot in a very short amount of time. This is a very big thing to do and they're doing a good job. I feel very hopeful."

Realistically, Ryan said, people will need to be both deeply committed and very patient. The changes could take seven to 10 years to become institutionalized. "It will take a very long time to make this system better," he said.

© 2003 Philadelphia Inquirer and wire service sources.

Rare disorder can lead to 'garbage-can' eating

Its symptoms, including stunted growth, can mirror those in the Jackson case. One official said, "I'm not ruling it out."

By Marie McCullough Inquirer Staff Writer Nov. 16, 2003

A rare medical disorder sometimes called "garbage-can syndrome" afflicts children in ways that seem to mirror the symptoms seen in the Collingswood starvation cases.

Children and adolescents who develop this disorder, also known as "psychosocial dwarfism," are profoundly emotionally deprived for so long that their growth hormones shut down - stunting their height, preventing puberty, even retarding their intelligence. Often, they exhibit bizarre feeding behaviors such as eating from garbage cans, drinking from toilets, gorging and vomiting, stealing and hoarding food, and regurgitating and spitting out food.

When they are moved to a nurturing environment, they grow rapidly and

the boys' growth was stunted. However, he said, he would not dismiss other possibilities including psychosocial dwarfism.

"I'm not ruling it out," Ryan said.

Ryan said that in an effort to understand better what has happened, his office has subpoenaed the boys' medical records and is continuing discussions with clinicians treating them.

Many chronic diseases and congenital abnormalities can inhibit growth and cause short stature, including dwarfism, hypothyroidism, pituitary tumors, anorexia, cystic fibrosis, diabetes and Turner's syndrome.

But if diagnostic tests and examinations rule out these causes, a doctor has to consider social and psychological stress, said Angelo Giardino, a St. Christopher's Hospital pediatrician who, like other doctors interviewed, has no direct knowledge of the Jackson case.

Giardino drew an analogy between the chronic mental and emotional stresses that can lead to a heart attack, and the chronic emotional deprivation that can suppress growth hormones.

"Psychological stress can have physiological effects," he said.

New Jersey officials have said they plan to gather full psychological profiles on all four brothers in the coming weeks.

Robert Blizzard, an emeritus professor of pediatrics at the University of Virginia, was among the first to document psychosocial dwarfism, in the 1960s and 1970s. Unfortunately, he said, "social workers and judges don't understand this disorder."

At the core of this complex illness is a disturbed relationship between the child and the parent or caretaker. There may be outright abuse, rejection or abandonment of the child. Or, a caring parent may be unable to deal adequately with the child because of substance abuse, depression or her own emotional problems.

In the 1960s, new technology enabled researchers to prove, by measuring hormone levels in the blood, that the mind could influence growth through hormone imbalances. They found that severe, sustained emotional deprivation could suppress the primary growth hormone, disrupt thyroid function, and make target cells less sensitive to growth hormones.

Still, diagnosis of psychosocial dwarfism is tricky, because sometimes these children also are malnourished, a condition that by itself inhibits growth.

How can observers theua/er's Hospital pediatrician who, like other rejectiCnabrado H peoneSciowth8.381 36.82

outgoing, ate ravenously, and gained pounds. He said his foster parents had punished his behavior by holding food and drink and locking him in his bedroom at night to keep from eating.

In the Jacksons' case, the parents said they had put an alarm on the door to prevent Bruce from sneaking in, then gorging and vomiting. Vanessa Jackson told authorities she had not taken the boys to doctor for five years.

Experts say that children who suffer from psychosocial dwarfism tend to be emotionally and psychologically unstable when they grow up, particularly if the disorder is diagnosed late in childhood.

That, experts agree, is why parents should seek help - and why they understand how the Jacksons got into such a deep crisis.

"Functional families ask for help," said Giardino of St. Christopher's hospital. "When did the pattern not make sense in terms of the boys' growth?... When was someone going to pull the rip cord on the parachute?"

© 2003 Philadelphia Inquirer and wire service sources.

Tom Blatner, a child welfare consultant and former head of DYFS, said the state owes the 19-year-old every chance "the best possible life."

"He obviously needs someone to connect to, services, and some benefits," he said. "Any way you cut it, the system failed this family."

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

5:88) 01-DEC-2003 07:49 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

Child Advocate has uncommon power

Kevin Ryan's job is to push for fixes to N.J.'s broken system

By JASON NARK Courier-Post Staff November 30, 2003

The stacks of paperwork sitting in Kevin Ryan's office would have you believe he has been New Jersey's Child Advocate for years.

Ryan has held the position since its creation two months ago, already has launched investigations into several state offices and is at the forefront of a child-abuse case making headlines worldwide.

The former deputy chief of management and operations for Gov. James McGreevey, Ryan was appointed to the \$126,000 per-year position Sept. 26.

"The extent of the problems in the child welfare system here is staggering," Ryan said during an interview in his office.

Currently, there are 21 child advocates across the country, but the power given to him in New Jersey is rare, said Ryan, who has a staff of 11.

"We have the power to make a public demand for corrective action," Ryan said, an attorney who previously had worked for Covenant House, the largest privately funded childcare agency in the United States.

He can, for example, sue state agencies and review sensitive files.

McGreevey created the position following the discovery in January of the mummified body of a 7-year-old child in Newark. The child had been abused and starved while under the supervision of the Division of Youth and Family Services.

A 1999 lawsuit brought against the state by Manhattan-based advocacy group Children's Rights International also prompted Ryan's appointment. A settlement calling for broad reforms and immediate additional funding was reached in June and approved by a judge Sept. 2.

In a statement, McGreevey called the Office of Child Advocate a "single independent watchdog."

"There is no more fundamental obligation of government than to protect children," McGreevey said. "And the Office of Child Advocate . . . will ensure that we are meeting that obligation. As a lifelong tireless advocate, Kevin Ryan will answer purely to the children he serves."

On his first day on the job, Ryan launched a probe into Monmouth County's Arthur Brisbane Child Center, where staff at the psychiatric facility face accusations of sexual misconduct and other patient abuse. His second day, Ryan launched investigations into overcrowded juvenile detention centers in Camden, Atlantic, Essex and Union counties.

When a Collingswood couple was arrested Oct. 24 on assault and neglect charges, Ryan, and rest of the nation, learned of the horrific accusations against Raymond and Vanessa Jackson - the systematic starvation of four boys. The boys, authorities say, suffered from significant growth retardation, profoundly delayed bone maturation and

malnutrition.

Ryan is helping the Camden County Prosecutor's Office investigate the case and has since testified before a congressional committee and appeared on 60 Minutes II to call for change.

Ryan has reviewed documents from every government agency involved with the Jacksons, including files on all six of their adopted children and their one foster child. Two of the five files on the foster children, Blaine and Vanessa, run to about 400 pages. The Jacksons were days away from adopting them when authorities removed the boys from the home Oct. 10. They intervened after a neighbor found the oldest boy, Bruce, rummaging through a trash can.

While friends and family have said the Jacksons were overwhelmed by the boys' medical problems, Ryan said the blame lies with Raymond and Vanessa.

"The government is never going to love a child; the Jacksons had to do it," he said. Ryan said the Jacksons' adopted sons are aware of what has happened to them and of their parents' arrests.

"They are all very sensitive to this, but they all continue to grow up," Ryan said.

Ryan said he is preparing a timeline of the Jacksons' involvement with the foster care system to find out how the situation was permitted to deteriorate.

"Bruce Jackson weighed 49 pounds when they adopted him (in 1996) and was 145 when a neighbor found him years later," Ryan said.

On a larger scale, Ryan is preparing a report on DYFS that he hopes to present to a congressional subcommittee by January. The committee will, in turn, issue a report of recommended actions to overhaul DYFS.

Some immediate changes must be made, Ryan said, before the system can improve. Among them are lowering caseworkers' workload, increasing funding and better training for employees, he said.

"Keeping children safe is not cheap, but you pay for it in graveyards," he said.

Scrutiny escalates at DYFS

Successes keep workers going despite difficulties

By KAREN KENNEDY-HALL Courier-Post Staff November 30, 2003

Delores McFadden has 130 children.

She calls them "my kids" and worries as a parent would.

"I pray every day, 'Please God, don't let anything happen to any of my kids,'" she said.

McFadden is a shop steward with the local union that represents Division of Youth and Family Services workers. She is also a 6 1/2-year Camden caseworker.

It's a job she believes in despite being asked to do the impossible.

"I cannot possibly service 130 children," said the 35-year-old McFadden. "Now, all I do is put a Band-Aid on it and clients stay in the system."

Since the discovery in January of the mummified body of a 7-year-old boy in Newark and last month's discovery of four starving boys in Collingswood, the state's 1,958 DYFS workers have come under intense scrutiny.

The caseworker in the Newark case resigned; nine workers are facing investigation in the Collingswood case. DYFS

officials have said they stand behind the firings - they say workers must be held accountable.

McFadden and three other workers with the Camden office, who were connected with the Collingswood case, told the Courier-Post they are horrified when something bad happens to a child. However, many more are because of DYFS involvement, they said.

"I know I make a difference, and that's what gets me out of bed every day," said David Colo Franson, union steward and a six-year caseworker.

He recalls removing two young boys who were being abused and neglected.

While the boys were at the hospital for a required physical, he brought sandwiches.

"One of the boys said, 'David, I love you.' "

The four workers say the job is stressful with too many children to supervise and not enough counseling resources, foster homes or emotional support.

Many DYFS children have serious mental health or emotional problems. Some have been neglected or physically and sexually abused. Others are just angry.

McFadden said she has been through some difficult situations.

She has been held hostage, verbally abused and threatened.

She spends hours at hospitals with children, talking with teachers during visitations.

The stress of dealing with those problems, coupled with the long hours, sometimes 60 or more a week - have taken their toll.

McFadden moves slowly, like the weight of the world is on her shoulders, and there's a sadness in her eyes.

"I have seen things," she said softly, tears welling up.

One child, then a 4-year-old, was kicked by the mother's boyfriend across a room and hit a wall, breaking a hip.

The child is thriving now, living with a relative but will always have one leg one-half inch shorter than the other, McFadden said.

As an intake unit worker, McFadden is the first person to go into a home to investigate allegations of child abuse or neglect.

She goes into some of the worst neighborhoods, sometimes at night, only with a cell phone.

In January, she and a co-worker entered a home to investigate an area that it was known for its drug and gang activity.

Once inside, they were forced to stand against the wall to stand in a line (i)Tj at EMC oA0> sho(i to-phanit water

offd is on h()Tj EMC BDC plaTj E who wtua904

"There's no downtime," said McFadden, who is married with one child and stepchildren.

She has thought about quitting, but the success stories keep her going.

One boy in particular has made her proud. Her first contact with him was when he was a teenager. Now, he's gone to college and has landed a job as a counselor, she said. She gave him a reference.

Another of McFadden's kids, a girl, didn't go to college but has a job and is now engaged.

"Those are the kinds of things that make me do it," McFadden said.

The DYFS workers say when they knock on a door, they have no idea what they're going to find on the other side.

Jerome Jackson, a 2 1/2-year caseworker, remembers removing a boy, ages 10-17, from a home in deplorable condition.

"There were roaches everywhere, climbing on the cats and dogs. They were climbing all over the ceiling."

One dropped on his head, he said.

The 27-year-old said he toughed it out and said to himself, "I have to do here."

The children are now fine in foster care.

Jackson, who is single, said he stays on the job because he loves kids.

And with the shortage of workers, he said if he leaves, his co-workers would have to take over his cases.

The night before the interview, Jackson spent hours at a local hospital when he drove a child to a foster home.

He arrived home at 1 a.m. and was back in the office by 9 a.m.

Jackson said he views such hours as being part of the job.

Union steward Denise Greene describes herself as a "bleeding heart worker."

For six years, she worked in the adoption resource center unit, which oversees the adoption of DYFS children, and recently moved into ongoing casework.

After just two days in an adoptive home, one of her children died from cancer. She had visited the child many times over a two-year period.

To her, it was like losing her own child. Counseling helped, but she said the child's death changed her life.

McFadden said one DYFS reform she'd like to see is for workers to have access to counseling for everyday stresses.

Currently, counseling is provided only after traumatic events, she said.

"They forget you're a person," McFadden said of DYFS officials. "Our cases are very complex."

Paul Alexander, assistant president of Communications Workers of America, agreed.

"A social worker who is having problems winds up being treated like a patient," he said.

DYFS scrambles to hire workers, fix shortcomings

By KAREN KENNEDY-HALL

Courier-Post Staff

November 30, 2003

A federal judge in September ruled that New Jersey's child welfare system is in serious trouble and mandated that a plan for reform be submitted to a panel of experts by January.

He was ruling on a lawsuit, filed in 1999 by Manhattan-based Child Rights International, which cited numerous problems with the agency. Among its findings, based on a review of 500 cases:

One in five children with a documented medical need did not receive any

5:89) 06-DEC-2003 08:04 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

Agency chief is expected to resign today after term marked by tumult and progress

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO AND MARY JO PATTERSON

"The situation is deplorable. It's unacceptable," she said in the case. "I am faced with the understanding that I have staff that are either incompetent, uncaring, or who have falsified records."

Then she fired nine child welfare workers.

The publicity attending the DYFS cases obscured much of Harris' earlier record and accomplishments. Three months before the Faheem Williams scandal, for example, Harris had appeared before state legislators to discuss DYFS problems.

She also made progress on vexing issues facing people in poverty with disabilities. As the state struggled with an enormous budget deficit, she successfully lobbied McGreevey and the state Legislature to allocate tens of millions of dollars for seven developmental centers, averting a loss of federal funding.

In addition, Harris helped break a bureaucratic logjam at the Division of Developmental Disabilities that allowed several hundred people to move out of group homes after waiting for as long as three years for openings.

She leaves a job that paid \$137,165. With 19,000 employees and an \$8.3 billion budget, it is New Jersey's largest state agency. At Rutgers, Harris is expected to direct a project that will study urban development; her salary will be paid by the university's central administration.

There were mixed reactions yesterday that she will soon be gone.

The Rev. Deforest "Buster" Soaries, pastor of First Baptist Church in Franklin Township and a

Many child welfare advocates said her departure would offer the governor a chance to jump-start the state's effort to revamp a sprawling social service network, which has 19,000 employees, a budget of \$1.8 billion and is responsible for aiding the disabled, the mentally ill and thousands of children.

Cecilia Zalkind, executive director of the Association for Children in New Jersey, said Ms. Harris was not given the resources to cope with the

million poor and disabled people, and a child welfare agency that has seen a series of scandals and child deaths

"Commissioner Harris performed admirably in what is arguably the

By MICHAEL SYMONS December 6, 2003

Gannett State Bureau TRENTON

Gwendolyn Long Harris will resign as commissioner of the Department of Human Services on Feb. 15 after less than two years on the job, a tenure that included cases of child abuse in Collingswood and Newark that attracted nationwide attention.

Harris has begun reforming the state Division of Youth and Family Services, but those efforts - begun in the wake of the Newark case in which the body of a boy was found mummified in his basement tower shadowed by the discovery last month of starving boys in Collingswood.

Gov. James E. McGreevey has been pushing for new leadership in the Department of Human Services since last month according to sources.

In a statement, McGreevey said Harris first approached him in June about leaving her state post to work at Rutgers University.

McGreevey said Harris "performed admirably in what is arguably the toughest job in state government," and he specifically cited the child-welfare problems at DYFS.

"She never shied away from those challenges. She conceded the systemic deficiencies and then went about fixing them. I firmly believe that her actions to date, and the plan that is being drafted for the court-ordered DYFS on a corrective course of action," he said.

Harris said she leaves "with mixed feelings." She said the Department of Human Services budget has been increased a time when most state departments were being cut.

In the past two years, the operating budget for her department increased by 22 percent.

"Rather than requiring quick fixes to the state's ailing child welfare system, Governor McGreevey gave his full support to real and lasting changes that will benefit New Jersey's children for years to come," Harris said.

Harris was generally praised for her work at the Department of Human Services. Most observers said DYFS' woes are bigger than one person - even critics from Communications Workers of America Local 1034, who thought Harris came down too hard on caseworkers.

"We wish the commissioner well," said Paul Alexander, Local 1034's assistant president. "She inherited a very troubled agency at a difficult time. In the best of circumstances, it's not an easy job. I think she gave her best efforts for the short time she was there."

Kevin Ryan, the state child advocate, said he has "deep respect for her," then added: "New Jersey is embarking upon the most important chapter of child welfare reform in its history. Going forward with strong leadership will be essential."

Systemic problems at DYFS - which is one of nine divisions in the department - persisted for years, but surged into prominence in January when police in Newark found the remains of Faheem Williams, 7, in a plastic container in a locked basement.

Last month, 19-year-old Bruce Jackson of Collingswood who weighed 45 pounds was found rummaging through a neighbor's trash can for food. Authorities subsequently found three more brothers also starving. Jackson's adoptive parents say the boys have eating disorders.

In both cases, the boys were under DYFS' supervision. Files showed caseworkers had visited both homes but either closed the cases without investigating or didn't ask questions while visiting on unrelated topics.

Earlier this year, the state settled a lawsuit brought by Child Rights Inc., a nonprofit group that had sued over treatment of kids in foster homes and group homes. The state agreed to various reforms increased oversight by a court-appointed panel.

Harris will remain at her state job until the final reform plan required under that settlement is filed with a federal judge in January.

Harris served for 12 years as chief of staff, business administrator and human services director to Trenton Mayor Doug Palmer before McGreevey hired her on Feb. 12, 2002. Harris was confirmed by the state Senate March 25.

The Department of Human Services is the largest in state government with about 19,000 employees and a budget, including federal and other non-state funding, of \$8.5 billion. It serves about 1 million people, including the poor, disabled and abused.

Harris, 53, has been pursuing a doctorate degree in urban planning and development at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University. She is going to become director of the New Jersey Urban Development Project at Rutgers.

RELEASE: December 5, 2003

JOINT STATEMENT FROM GOVERNOR JAMES E. MCGREEVEY AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSIONER GWENDOLYN L. HARRIS

STATEMENT FROM COMMISSIONER HARRIS

It is with mixed feelings that I have resigned, effective February 2004, from my position as Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Human Services.

Serving as Commissioner has been an incredible challenge and opportunity. Every day there was an opportunity to make a difference in people's lives, and we did that. But it had been my goal and dream for time to work in the academic realm, and that opportunity has become available.

In March 2004, I will begin working as Director of the New Jersey Urban Development Project at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University, where I will help shape state urban development policy.

Managing a department the size and complexity Human Services has been extraordinarily challenging and rewarding. Through it all, I have considered myself blessed to work for a Governor who places the interests of the state's most vulnerable citizens at the top of his agenda. I am also blessed to have worked with many dedicated and talented human services advocates, members of the legislature, employees of my state departments and a good number of the 19,000 dedicated and talented employees of this department.

During these excruciatingly difficult fiscal times, when other state department budgets were slashed, Governor McGreevey increased my department's budget and maintained vital services to the most needy. Rather than requiring quick fixes to the state's ailing child welfare system, Governor McGreevey gave his full support to real and lasting changes that will benefit New Jersey's children for years to come. Instead of putting off reforms in the systems that serve people with disabilities, this administration bolstered staffing in our state psychiatric hospitals and developmental centers and set in motion historic innovations in our community care system.

This Governor has always shown tremendous support for this department. That is why, when I sought to leave the department for the academic realm several months ago, and Governor McGreevey asked me to stay, I agreed. And why I have agreed to stay until February, to ensure that a complete and comprehensive blueprint for reform of the child welfare system is forwarded to a federal judge early next year. This report is required as a part of the settlement of the

Children's Rights lawsuit against the state's child welfare system.

With Governor McGreevey's support, we have accomplished much during the nearly two years. I am particularly proud of the fact that the department has:

- regained and maintained federal certification for all of the state's institutions for people with disabilities and

with mental illnesses.

She also pushed forward dramatic improvements in the efficiency of the state's food stamp program, reducing the error rate from one of the worst in the country to the third best in the nation, and drawing in a \$1.4 million federal performance bonus.

Perhaps most importantly, she began implementation of a child welfare information and tracking system that was many years past due and hired hundreds of front-line DYFS caseworkers to protect children who are at risk of abuse or neglect. Today, DYFS has more than 1,500 caseworkers, the most ever in its history.

These accomplishments will be watershed moments in our effort to rebuild this child welfare system and ensure that children are safe under supervision.

a 19-year-old weighed just 45 pounds. Child advocates say the statistics released on Wednesday provide disheartening evidence that the state's plan to overhaul DYFS is inadequate. The state's services commissioner, Gwendolyn L. Harris, resigned last month amid criticism from union leaders and advocates who said she was moving too slowly to address the problems.

"You have to ask yourself, 'What has happened this year?'" Cecilia Zalkind, executive director of the Association for Children of New Jersey. "They've hired a few more case workers, but they have over 60,000 the highest caseload ever, and the system is in chaos. I don't see any indication that anything is being done to keep these children safer."

Copyright 2003 The New York Times Company

More troubles for N.J. children

Abuse-related deaths rose as adoptions fell. "It has been a rough year," a DYFS spokesman said.

By Mitch Lipka Inquirer Trenton Bureau Dec. 18, 2003

Child abuse and neglect deaths in New Jersey surged in 2003 as adoptions plunged - a low note to an already dismal year for child welfare in New Jersey.

The 37 suspected and confirmed abuse and neglect deaths in the state in a report released yesterday, are by far the most since the state began reporting the statistic in 1998. Each year since then, however, has numbered from 23 to 27.

Another report, also released yesterday, showed adoptions fell by a third.

The families of 18 of the children who died this year had been investigated by the Division of Youth and Family Services.

"It has been a rough year for children," said Ralph Siegel, a DYFS spokesman. "It is bad news on top of bad news."

It has also been a rough year for DYFS, starting with the discovery of the emaciated body of 7-year-old Faheem Williams in a Newark basement in January and ending with the resignation this month of Human Services Commissioner Gwendolyn Harris. In June, the state settled a four-year-old lawsuit alleging mistreatment of foster children in its custody, forcing an order that DYFS retool how it operates. Another black eye for DYFS was the discovery of the four starving Jackson brothers in Collingswood. They apparently had been seen by DYFS workers for years, but no action was taken.

As for the child deaths, Siegel said that there was no immediate explanation for the overall increase and that DYFS was more focused on the 18 children known to the agency.

"There's 18 children dead," Siegel said. "It's alarming."

It is particularly disturbing, he said, that DYFS has been unable to reduce the number of deaths among families already known to the agency.

Among the deaths of local children whose families were known to DYFS:

Michael Malinowski, 2, who died in an October car fire in Mount Laurel after allegedly being left in the vehicle by his grandmother.

Rhiannon Wasserman, 10, and her brother, Michael, 8, of Magnolia were killed in July by their father.

A newborn boy found in a garbage bag in Barrington.

The head of the state's Office of the Child Advocate said the increase

DYFS reports 37 deaths in 2003

Suspected cases from abuse or neglect highest in 13 years

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO Star-Ledger Staff December 18, 2003

Thirty-seven New Jersey children died from suspected abuse or neglect -- the highest number the state has recorded in 13 years.

That is a 28 percent increase over 2002, when 29 children perished from maltreatment, and two fewer than the 1990 record, according to a year-end report released yesterday by the state Division of Youth and Family Services.

DYFS workers had at one point or another investigated the living conditions of 18 of the 37 children who died. Eight of the children had open files at the time of their death, according to the report.

"It's been an exceptionally violent year for children," the state Advocate Kevin Ryan said yesterday. "How could so many children have died in our communities?"

Two children had their necks slashed by their stepmother. An infant was discarded in a trash bag shortly after his 14-year-old mother gave birth to him at home. Several infants were shaken to death; two others drowned in a bucket of water. Two toddler brothers died when they were strapped in their car seats with the windows rolled up during a heat wave.

Yesterday's report caps a grueling year for DYFS, which has been the target of unprecedented scrutiny and criticism. Some of the children's deaths touched off scandals and provoked biting criticism from Gov. James McGreevey after officials admitted errors in judgment and management that missed signs that a child was in jeopardy.

"It's more than troubling -- it's horrific," McGreevey said of the DYFS report during a radio call-in show last night. "We are going through these troubling times."

After Newark police recovered 7-year-old Faheem Williams' broken and mangled body in a relative's basement Jan. 11, Human Services Commissioner Gwendolyn L. Harris revealed DYFS workers had closed the family's case 11 months earlier without investigating a claim that Faheem and his brothers had been beaten and scalded.

The controversy over Faheem's death prompted New Jersey to settle a lawsuit against the foster care system, brought by the national child advocacy group, Children's Rights Inc. The state agreed to submit for a plan a month from today and undergo monitoring for at least two years by a panel of child welfare experts and a federal judge to ensure the agency improves.

McGreevey said he awaits the Jan. 18 report, hoping it "blows up the system" and replaces it with something that can ensure children are safe.

"For the 18 children who were known to DYFS, that plan has got to be measured against the real stories of these children, and what could we have done to prevent these children's deaths," Ryan said.

DYFS has learned lessons from the deaths of these children, DYFS spokesman Ralph Siegel said. Following Faheem's death, for instance, Harris required caseworkers to visit a child within 30 days before closing a family's case. After seeing various government agencies fail to help the Williams family, McGreevey created a "children's cabinet," a panel of high-ranking officials in his administration to share responsibility for child protection among the departments of health, corrections, education and other agencies.

Child welfare officials cautioned the number of fatalities attributed to suspected abuse and neglect in its report is not final. Prosecutors and DYFS investigators are still deliberating the cause of death in a handful of cases, and some may be deemed accidental or from natural causes, Siegel said. With two weeks left in the year, it's also possible the number of deaths may increase.

"We are not interested in the trend up or down. Every death is a tragedy and is tremendously disturbing," Siegel said. "The leadership has made an unprecedented effort to review cases personally to see what practices ought to change."

DYFS' best efforts seemed to have little effect on saving 21-month-old Daniel Soto's life.

Daniel and his two brothers spent a year in foster care in October 2004, but returned home to East Windsor last year after his mother --

Davy, 50, is an experienced administrator who in recent months has been the governor's point man on child welfare reform. Given his close relationship with the governor, those people say, Davy's appointment would underscore McGreevey's commitment to fix the department's embarrassing Division of Youth and Family Services.

Davy was one of only two finalists for the job to lead the department, according to those sources, who asked not to be identified. The other contender, Child Advocate Kevin Ryan, a former Davy deputy, recently threw himself out of the running.

The governor's spokeswoman, Kathy Ellis, would neither confirm nor deny Davy is the leading contender. "We are not ready to announce the new commissioner," she said.

McGreevey hopes to name a new commissioner by mid-January to replace Dolyn Harris, who resigned earlier this month. The governor declined to discuss his plans for the post in an interview last Friday. Davy's return calls yesterday seeking comment.

The Department of Human Services has been at the center of controversy because of a series of high-profile child abuse cases that were handled by DYFS. The governor has vowed to overhaul the agency, which is failing to protect the more than 60,000 children under state care.

Steve Cohen, chairman of the New Jersey Child Welfare Panel guiding the state's DYFS reform efforts, said the department needs someone with a lot of child welfare experience and has had success in running a child welfare system, or a strong manager with "enough political influence so they can bring something special to the table."

"If it winds up being Jim (Davy) and he can bring this to the table, a good thing" Cohen said.

Cecilia Zalkind, executive director of the Association for Children in New Jersey, said she would support Davy's selection.

"I think he's a great choice," she said. "The department is a mess and he is the right man to lead it. The support of the governor's office is essential. More than that, he has a broad perspective on children and families that will be an enormous benefit."

Harris announced her resignation as Human Services commissioner this month and will leave the job in February. Though McGreevey praised her tenure, people close to her said she bore the brunt of the governor's frustration over the pace of change at DYFS and that he wanted new leadership.

Davy is chief of management and operations for McGreevey's staff. Before that, he served as manager of the governor's transition team following the 2001 election and was chief operating officer of his 2001 campaign. For nearly a decade before that, Davy served as business administrator in Woodbridge while McGreevey was mayor.

Davy maintains a low profile, but he is ubiquitous throughout state government, serving as the governor's liaison to the Cabinet and monitoring executive branch departments.

Over the last year, Davy's name surfaced in the controversy over the State Parole Board's decision to grant parole to reputed Genovese family mobster Angelo Prisco.

The former director of the board told State Police that the board chairman at the time "implied" Davy had influenced the decision. Prisco's parole continues to be investigated by the state Division of Criminal Justice, John Hagerty, a spokesman for the division, said yesterday.

Davy has declined to comment on the Prisco case. But McGreevey has previously defended his aide, even likening him to Mother Teresa and declaring that Davy's "greatest decision in life is going to the 9 o'clock:30 Mass every day."

If nominated by McGreevey, Davy would have to be confirmed by the Senate. Davy is the last member of the

governor's original senior staff remain in his job.

Human Services is the state's largest department, with an \$8.3 billion budget and a staff of nearly 19,000.

In addition to overseeing DYFS, the department serves 1 million people who rely on Medicaid and welfare, as well as people with physical, developmental and mental disabilities. It runs institutions for people with developmental disabilities and psychiatric hospitals.

Copyright 2003 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

5:92) 28-DEC-2003 08:46 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

DYFS Director Edward Cotton said the state deserves some credit for reaching a critical milestone: filling 271 new jobs funded by the legislature this year and back-filling a slew of vacancies by Dec. 1.

"I don't know if DYFS has ever had full staffing," said Cotton, who took over the daily operations of the agency in 2003. "It's a tough time. When I go and meet with staff, I usually end up feeling optimistic that they are going to make it work no matter what it takes."

Few DYFS critics share Cotton's optimism.

"As far as I can tell, nothing has really changed for DYFS," said Marcia Robinson Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights Inc., the national child advocacy group that sued the state. "The one as rework

nation can serve as a model, experts say.

"It's not being done right anywhere," said Richard Gelles, dean of the

The family-preservation movement, championed by the National Council on Child Protection Reform and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which provided staff members to the expert panel reviewing the state's plan to the court, sees hope in keeping families intact by enlisting assistance from other family members and offering services from drug counseling to parenting training.

Family preservation is predicated on a parent's ability to change. "I really believe that most parents don't want to lose their children," said Cotton, the DYFS director.

To make the new system succeed, Cotton said it will take a considerable increase in the agency's \$500 million-plus budget and will require adding DYFS' approximately 1,800 caseworkers.

Cotton said he could not yet be specific about the costs, but was drawing up scenarios that would show what it would take to significantly reduce each worker's caseload.

Cotton envisions a new DYFS with workers given screening tools to ensure that children in danger are removed from harm's way and those who have hope of staying at home are given that chance.

With that, the ranks of children in foster care and the number of children abused will also drop, Cotton said.

"We're taking too many kids into care," he said. "We're going to focus on the kids that are at such a high risk they can't be left in their homes."

So far, Wexler likes what he has heard.

"I don't think you should have the power to tear a child away from a family based on a gut feeling," he said.

Other places that have worked to remedy broken systems - such as New York and Illinois, where Cotton spent most of his career - have chosen similar paths. All are hailed by family-preservation proponents as success stories.

But the praise for that approach is not universal.

"I can tell you categorically it's not going to work," Penn's Gehlert said of New Jersey's efforts. "Some families can't be helped. They just can't."

"If good intentions changed people, very few people would smoke or be overweight. There's an inherent naivete in the Casey Foundation and Richard's [Wexler] approach to changing extremely dysfunctional households."

Because the federal funding scheme favors foster care and adoption over family preservation, most child-welfare agencies lean toward removing the child from those who are abusing or neglecting them.

That makes it far harder to get involved in helping families deal with problems, Wexler contends.

"You have incentives for adoptions, you have incentives for foster care. You have no incentives to keep children in their own homes," he said.

This fiscal year ending Sept. 30, foster-care programs in the United States will get \$5 billion from the federal government compared with only \$700 million for programs favoring family preservation.

"States started to do the things the federal government was paying them

© 2003 Philadelphia Inquirer and wire service sources.

5:94) 30-DEC-2003 07:23 [Joh6earight \(searighj\)](#)

A Strict Plan to Remedy Child Welfare in Connecticut

By STACEY STOWE NY Times December 30, 2003

HARTFORD, Dec. 29 — A federal judge has ordered Connecticut's beleaguered child welfare agency to comply with a stringent plan to improve within three years to end its court oversight.

The 22-point plan, announced on Monday, was developed by the federal-appointed monitor, who was given direct management authority of the agency, the State Department of Children and Families, in October.

The monitor, Dr. D. Ray Sirry, oversees the agency with members of a panel that includes the agency's commissioner and the secretary of the state's Office of Policy and Management.

Connecticut is one of eight states in which the courts have stepped in to manage child welfare agencies.

(After a string of reports of child abuse and neglect, and following settlement of a lawsuit two months ago, New Jersey has begun working with an independent panel to implement its own child welfare reforms.)

Last fall, in an attempt to avoid federal receivership, Gov. John Rowland became the first governor to admit that his state's child welfare agency was not in compliance with court orders. He agreed to court intervention in the agency's management.

On Dec. 18, Connecticut's child advocate, Jeanne Milstein, sued the state, claiming that the state had repeatedly failed to diagnose the problem and properly care for a boy in its custody.

The new plan, signed on Dec. 23 by Judge Alan H. Nevas of Federal District Court and announced on Monday by Dr. Sirry, orders the state to meet percentage goals in 22 areas, including timely reporting of abuse and neglect; more regular visits by social workers to children in state custody; and adequate medical, dental and mental health care for children in its watch.

The order requires the state to maintain the financial resources to implement the plan, and it cannot be appealed.

Dr. Sirry is authorized to resolve issues between Judge Nevas and himself, the agency commissioner, Darlene Dunbar, and the policy secretary, Marc S. Ryan.

The deadline for full compliance with the order is Nov. 1, 2006.

According to Mr. Rowland's spokesman, the governor said the state was committed to working with the monitor to end federal oversight of the child welfare agency, including complying with the latest order.

Management issues — not lack of money — have plagued the agency, advocates have said. Its budget is roughly \$600 million, up from \$256 million in 1995.

In a statement released on Monday, Dr. Sirry said that improvements would require a "more effective work style and major cultural change throughout the agency." Two months ago, in an attempt to decentralize the agency, he announced the creation of 13 area offices to provide neighborhood-based services.

Ms. Dunbar, the agency's third commissioner in three years, said in a statement on Monday that the "department will focus all of our energies toward achieving these outcomes."

She said, however, that at least two of the goals could not be met in the allotted time: reducing the percentage of children who live in residential treatment centers to 11 percent, from the current 16.5 percent, and requiring that at least

32 percent of adoptions be made ~~five~~ years after children are removed from a home; only 9 percent are now completed, said an agency spokesman, Gary Kleblatt.

Fourteen years ago, Children's Rights Inc., a child advocacy ~~group~~ based in New York, and the Center for Children's Advocacy at the University of Connecticut School of Law, sued the agency on behalf of ~~thousands~~ of children in state care. Yet despite a 1991 settlement ~~that~~ required numerous improvements, Connecticut failed at least a dozen ~~times~~ to meet the terms, according to Ira Lustbader, associate director of ~~Children's Rights Inc.~~

The latest failure to comply with a plan that would have ended ~~oversight~~ occurred last summer, when the state was unable to meet 28 of ~~35~~ benchmarks for reform.

A report by Dr. Sirry found serious lapses in the agency's ability ~~to~~ conduct an investigation. It also revealed some woeful statistics, including the fact that one-quarter of the children in Connecticut ~~do not~~ have medical, dental or mental health needs that go unmet for ~~more~~ than 60 days.

Mr. Lustbader and Martha Stone, director of the Center for Child ~~Advocacy~~, sued to place the agency in federal receivership. The suit was ~~settled~~ in October, giving Dr. Sirry direct management of the agency.

Copyright 2003 The New York Times Company

5:96) 04-JAN-2004 08:24 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

A Year After the Horror Next Door, Parker Street Is Keeping Watch

By RICHARD LEZIN JONES NYTimes January 4, 2004

NEWARK

THE teddy bears are gone, but the police tape is still there.

"Yeah," said Vera Barksdale from her front steps on Parker Street ~~opposite~~ the house where the police found the body of Faheem Williams — the 7-year-old boy who, in death, many credit with helping ~~change~~ a troubled child welfare agency that failed him in life. "I think they ~~left~~ it up there so nobody would break into the place."

Sorrow came to Parker Street a year ago today, when the police ~~found~~ Faheem's brothers starving but alive in a locked cellar. The next ~~day~~, searchers recovered Faheem's mummified remains in a purple ~~plastic~~ container.

In those first few days after the discovery of the boys — before a ~~frail~~ welfare changes inspired by the case — Ms. Barksdale watched as a memorial of cards, balloons, candles and teddy bears bloomed ~~side~~ the sidewalk in front of their house.

The shrine was taken away months ago, but on Friday strands of ~~yellow~~ tape marked "Police Line Do Not Cross" remained, spooled almost delicately ~~around~~ the wrought-iron gate and banister. The message "R.I.P. Faheem" ~~scrawled~~ in fading ink, was still visible on a pair of railings. And ~~Ms.~~ Barksdale, something else has lingered.

It seems to her that over the past year, residents in this ~~struggling~~ neighborhood of Newark's North Ward near Branch Brook Park have paid a little ~~more~~ attention to their neighbors — studying unfamiliar faces, watching ~~one~~ another's homes and, especially, one another's children.

Ms. Barksdale readily concedes that she may be overly optimistic ~~neighborhoods~~ everywhere, and especially here, is easy, and sometimes ~~even~~ preferable, to simply live in a cocoon where next-door neighbors ~~do not~~ even know one another's names. And, she said, that still holds ~~for~~ many here.

But after the horror of last January, Ms. Barksdale said, from ~~her~~ on Parker Street at least, something has changed

The state had agreed to the Jan. 20 deadline last June as it settled an action lawsuit brought by the advocacy group Children's Rights Inc. The McGreevey administration promised a thorough overhaul of the Division of Youth and Family Services and said it would have an action plan ready.

James Davy, the operations chief for Gov. James E. McGreevey, asked for a 30-day extension," McGreevey spokesman Micah Rasmussen said. McGreevey planned today to officially announce Davy's nomination as Human Services commissioner, to succeed Gwendolyn L. Harris.

Children's Rights executive director Marcia Robinson Lowry acknowledged informal negotiations were taking place and said nothing was decided.

"Certainly I would not agree simply to an extension -- there are a number of issues I would be concerned about," said Lowry, declining to elaborate.

The group's lawsuit accused the Division of Youth and Family Services of dropping foster children in a mismanaged bureaucracy that leaves them at risk of abuse and neglect.

Child advocates and a labor leader familiar with the state's efforts to implement the plan due in 10 days still lacks a strategy on how to implement the necessary changes at DYFS.

"There was no direction. It was appalling," said Hetty Rosenstein, a union president of a union representing DYFS workers attended a number of meetings last month on what the plan should say. "A lot of what was there not specific, not focused, and didn't have dates or goals set. It didn't have the money lined up and what it will cost."

Rosenstein, the leader of Communications Workers of America Local 117, said getting an extension would be "a good thing," particularly because she has confidence Davy and his assistant, Lisa Eisenbud, will get it done.

State Child Advocate Kevin Ryan agreed that the plan needs more work.

"I can't describe how disappointing this is after the state has done so far, but I am hopeful that Davy will finally deliver for thousands of at-risk kids quickly," said Ryan, who worked under Davy before taking his current post.

Cecilia Zalkind, the executive director of the Association for Children in New Jersey, a Newark-based advocacy group, said any extension must come with a guarantee the plan will "address the immediate problems in DYFS."

"Things have gotten far worse since the signing of the settlement agreement for children's rights." azu8nnna>>>N7bgCntThe j 12.498 0 To

"I'm hoping that Jim Davy can finally deliver for literally tens of thousands of at-risk children across the state of New Jersey who have been waiting a long time for meaningful change," Ryan said.

A union leader who represents DYFS workers and has been involved in developing the plan said she, too, saw optimism in the failure.

"We haven't seen change. We haven't seen vision," said Rusty Rostenstein, president of Communication Workers of America Local 1037. "I think it's embarrassing. It would be more embarrassing and much worse if the Governor's Office was not saying there was not enough here. It would be more embarrassing and much worse if

services," Davy said.

The commissioner oversees an \$8.3 billion department serving 1 million people, including those in poverty who rely on Medicaid and welfare, as well as people living with physical, developmental and mental disabilities.

Melville D. Miller, executive director of Legal Services of New Jersey, which serves the poor, said he was impressed with Davy.

"He seems very focused and open-minded," Miller said after yesterday's session.

"We won't let them forget the other issues, such as the people who are succeeding under welfare reform," Miller said. "But DYFS has to be dealt with now."

to settle after Mr McGreevey said he would enact a series of policy changes and allow a federal judge to enforce the plan.

Ms. Harris, who was appointed in February 2002, helped create a master plan for the agency, but some critics called her slow to improve staffing, training and supervision. Others commended her broad vision.

Yesterday, the governor's press secretary, Micah Rasmussen, said Mr McGreevey appointed one of his most trusted aides because he wanted to keep close tabs on the overhaul.

"Governor McGreevey has worked with Jim Davy for more than 14 years," Rasmussen said. "Jim is a career public administrator and the governor's go-to guy, his right-hand man."

5:99) 15-JAN-2004 07:57 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

Emergency steps adopted by DYFS

Different procedures for closing cases and renewed efforts to find foster homes are among the changes.

By Robert Moran Inquirer Trenton Bureau Jan. 15, 2004

TRENTON - A series of "emergency interim measures" to address problems in the state's troubled child-welfare agency was announced yesterday after the state got extra time to come up with a final restructuring.

Facing a deadline next week, the Division of Youth and Family Services was given 30 more days to submit a plan because the draft that was in the state got extra time to come up with a final restructuring.

Thompson said that before the governor intervened, the proposal apparently floundered."

Kevin Ryan, the state child advocate, participated in the postponed discussions over the weekend.

"This is a moment for all of us to work together to make the case for substantive changes that stabilize this system, ensure accountability to children, and get DYFS on the road to enduring reform," Ryan said.

If the state missed the original deadline, it could have been subjected to a range of sanctions - the most extreme being a federal-court takeover of the agency.

"I think the extension is appropriate," said Cecelia Zalkind, executive director of the Association for Children of New Jersey. "Our concern was how this time is going to be used."

Paul Alexander, a union official, called the measures "a huge step."

However, Alexander raised concerns with the agency's decision to retain child-welfare workers to accompany caseworkers on the safety assessments.

He said it was unclear if the agency's duty

By "reordering priorities," Davy, currently the governor's chief management and operations, said he has freed up funds within the department that will total \$11.2 million a year to address long-ignored problems within DYFS.

Children's Rights Inc., the advocacy group that brought the class action lawsuit on behalf of foster children, said yesterday it agreed to extend the deadline for the overhaul plan until Feb. 18.

"As we understand it today, we are nowhere on the plan," said Terri Ripson, senior attorney at Children's Rights. "But we are glad this is getting deserved attention from the governor's office."

The New Jersey Child Welfare Panel, a group of experts appointed to settle the budget to monitor the state's reform progress, also agreed to the extension.

The short-term DYFS agenda includes:

Lining up day care and hiring aides to transport children who would otherwise spend their days in DYFS offices while waiting for their next foster homes. This is projected to cost \$3.7 million a year.

"It is worth every penny to have children in learning and loving environments, instead of occupying office space and enjoying the sporadic attention of well-meaning but busy and overworked staff," Davy said.

Spending \$1.2 million on overtime pay to allow DYFS supervisors to finish the paperwork required to close an estimated 6,000 cases that no longer require the agency's attention, and to allow licensing officers to expedite the certification of 100 foster homes within the next month.

Distributing \$1.5 million to private foster-parent groups to boost their efforts to recruit new foster families. One-third of that money will be spent within the next month.

Revisiting 6,000 children in foster homes, group homes, shelter institutions to assure their safety by June 30, at a cost of \$2.5 million.

Immediately assigning nurses to every DYFS office to speed the medical examinations required each time a child is moved from one home to another, an annual cost of \$1.75 million. Workers have argued that long waits in emergency rooms for routine physicals waste time and traumatize kids.

Assigning a coordinator at University Hospital in Newark to try to place "boarder babies" with relatives. The aim is to prevent extended hospital stays by newborns whose mothers are unable or unwilling to care for them. The coordinator will be based in Newark.

annually while funding for initial and subsequent medical screenings will grow by \$1.7 million annually. Aided in the original Children's Rights settlement agreement, DYFS also spend \$1.5 million to recruit more foster homes over the next year including \$500,000 in the next month alone.

"We need more foster homes and we need them now," said Davy. "We cannot wait weeks or months to launch innovative recruitment strategies. We must act now. We must get it done."

Last year, the State settled a class-action lawsuit filed on behalf of children in its care. As part of the settlement, the New Jersey Child Welfare Panel comprised of national experts was created to oversee the improving services to children and families. Public meetings were throughout the State and three workgroups were established in areas of resource families (foster care), community partnerships/development and practice model and system. Each workgroup identified problems in the current child welfare system while making recommendations considered for implementation.

Under the leadership of Davy, the State will work with the Panel to finalize a reform plan by February 18th. Once the plan has been submitted and approved, the Panel will monitor the State's progress in implementing the plan for an additional 18 months.

###

5:100) 17-JAN-2004 09:18 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

New DYFS plan to stress accountability

Published in the Asbury Park Press 1/17/04

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TRENTON -- The latest plan being put together to reform New Jersey's child welfare agency will establish a system of accountability and boost community-based programs, the state's newly appointed human services commissioner said yesterday.

James Davy ordered a staff of about 100, including members of the governor's office, to work through the weekend to finish the first draft of the plan to overhaul the state Division of Youth and Family Services.

5:102) 21-JAN-2004 10:21 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

Court rules on lawyers in child abuse case

Camden County couple are accused of starving 4 adopted sons

BY JUDITH LUCAS Star-Ledge Staff January 21, 2004

A Camden County couple accused of starving their four adopted sons won a minor victory yesterday when a judge ruled that their criminal defense attorneys also can represent them in Family Court.

The state Division of Youth and Family Services had argued that equal representation in the Camden court proceedings gives the lawyers for Raymond and Vanessa Jackson an unfair advantage because they would have access to the boys' psychological and biological history and their medical birth records.

Superior Court Judge Robert Page disagreed.

"They (DYFS) did not want us to get this information. They wanted to keep it from us," said attorney Richard Josselson who represents 50-year-old Raymond Jackson. "If they had succeeded, this information, entitled to it all, would only be available after indictment through discovery."

Page's decision required deputy state Attorney General Nora Pearce, who represented DYFS, to turn over four boxes of documents to Josselson and

addressing a critical need in the state's foster care system.

- Expedite medical screenings for children going into foster care.

Status: DYFS began discussions this week with the New Jersey Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics to help establish a pool of pediatricians who will be on-call and available to DYFS district offices when a child needs a physical exam. Also, Davy said, DYFS will hire 10 additional nurses to conduct some physicals; the agency's current nurses will be issued cell phones so they are instantly reachable; district offices will establish private areas for medical screenings.

RELEASE: January 20, 2004

Commissioner Designee Increases Funding for Emergency Safe Haven Ads

After a third baby abandonment in as many weeks, Human Services Commissioner designee James M. Davy announced that he has earmarked an additional \$100,000 to immediately air radio and television ads to raise awareness of the Safe Haven Infant Protection Act.

Davy also ordered that plans be implemented immediately to partner with local faith-based and community action agencies to flood neighborhoods with information about the Safe Haven program in supermarkets, Laundromats, bus stops, and other neighborhood sites throughout the state.

The Safe Haven law allows people to surrender an unwanted child at a

after-school programs and other places so they do not spend hours in DYFS district offices. In addition, DYFS reached agreements with several after-school programs to serve children who might otherwise spend the afternoon in a DYFS office. "This is a perfect example of changing expectations," Davy said. "Now it has been made absolutely clear

The foster care proposal would create a new work force -- estimated in the hundreds -- to tend to the needs of foster families. This would be in addition to the hundreds of caseworkers the state is expected to have in its current work force that monitors 63,000 children under state supervision. The average caseload for those 1,500 workers is 41, but many veteran workers say they juggle 70 or more cases.

Human Services officials and child advocates insist that the enormous investment is necessary for the state to avoid getting dragged back into federal court by Children's Rights Inc. of New York, the advocacy group that sued the state for violating the civil rights of its 14,300 foster children. Under the terms of a settlement, the state must submit a plan by Feb. 18 to a panel of experts monitoring the reform efforts.

James Davy, Gov. James E. McGreevey's management and operations chief, leading the planning process, declined to discuss the specifics of the plan yesterday. But he acknowledged it "is very likely to be expensive. We need to find a way to fund it."

"Everybody within the administration, within the Legislature and within New Jersey as a whole -- we need to find the political will to support this plan to protect children and families," said Davy, McGreevey's choice to become the department's next commissioner.

When asked if the state was considering a special tax to help fund DYFS, Davy replied: "We haven't ruled out anything."

McGreevey spokesman Micah Rasmussen said last night that although budget decisions have been made yet, "we know the reforms will not come cheap."

"The governor is certainly committed to DYFS reform," said Rasmussen, adding McGreevey added \$30 million to the agency's \$550 million budget for the current year.

State Child Advocate Kevin Ryan said he will push for a special fund for children's services. "Years from now, when political momentum shifts away from child welfare, we are going to need to be able to support this system," he said.

The reform ideas themselves have their share of supporters and detractors.

The foster home support worker idea came from a committee of volunteers headed by former Deputy Human Services Commissioner Colleen Maguire to advise the state on DYFS reform. The committee's report, obtained by The Star-Ledger, recommended that these workers not carry a caseload of more than five families, and visit each home monthly, "spending a minimum of one to four hours." The workers would be responsible for "breaking down" issues, including respite care, by knowing the family's needs.

Child welfare panel chairman Steve Cohen praised the idea, saying parents who have the help they need are likely to encourage their friends to join the program. "The best foster home recruiter is a satisfied foster parent," he said.

Cecilia Zalkind, executive director of the advocacy group, the Association for Children of New Jersey, said foster parents typically get scant attention from DYFS. "You can have four or five different children in the home, and a different caseworker for each child. Things don't get done. You need a worker for the foster home."

One veteran foster parent saw some potential problems with the idea.

The dual caseworkers could have conflicting interests, said Michelle Cannavento, a Long Valley foster parent who, along with her husband, leads the Foster Parents Association of Morris County. If a foster parent is accused of abuse or neglect, Cannavento said, "You can't have a caseworker on your side. They're there for the child, to keep the child safe."

"What the parents need is continuity. They do need a support person, but it can be another foster parent," said Cannavento, who has cared for 30 foster children in 11 years.

commissioner and Mr. Rowland to appropriate funds requested by the monitor, even though appropriations are the province of the General Assembly.

But Ira Lustbader, a lawyer for Children's Rights, said yesterday that the claim was a diversionary tactic. "We had a landmark agreement 90 days ago," he said. "Governor Rowland stood up and said, 'Whatever it takes to get the agency.' And now he's backing out. It's shameful."

A spokesman for Mr. Rowland said not only that the court-ordered plan erodes the authority of the legislature, but also that the administration thinks some of the measures it requires are too ambitious to accomplish in six years. "We're just being honest with the court and the monitor," said the spokesman, Dean Pagani.

Copyright 2004 The New York Times Company

5:106) 04-FEB-2004 21:43 [John Searight \(searighj\)](#)

scr

Cop

The panel's report, which tracked DYFS activities for the final six months of 2003, noted that even when state officials did meet some of the goals contained in the June 23 settlement agreement, progress came slowly.

The state, for instance, did create 305 DYFS jobs last year to ease its often staggering caseloads. But serious progress was not made until November, even though Gov. James E. McGreevey had earmarked the jobs nine months earlier.

"They did quite a lot of work in response to the commitments they made, but unfortunately that work didn't happen as fast or as consistently as we had hoped for," said panel Chairman Steve Cohen, a child-welfare expert from Annie E. Casey Foundation, a philanthropic think tank in Baltimore.

Children's Rights requested the panel's account of what happened because "we were getting a lot of conflicting information," Lowry said. "We wanted to have some specific information about what had been done and had not been done."

DYFS officials reported there were 3,928 foster homes in September, a decline of 85 since July, despite an additional \$1.5 million for a recruitment campaign.

But the panel questioned the accuracy of DYFS' numbers.

"They do not have an automated way of saying how many foster homes really are," Cohen said.

The panel also expressed concern about the accuracy of the state's assessments -- the face-to-face evaluations of 14,300 foster children. As a result of its assessments, DYFS removed roughly 3,000 foster children deemed to be unsafe. But the credibility of these assessments plummeted after the discovery in October of four emaciated boys, adopted through DYFS, at a home in Collingswood that had passed a safety assessment.

The report also noted that 70 percent of the foster children assessed were evaluated using a process the panel had deemed flawed -- a percentage higher than DYFS reported in October. At that time, the state agreed to assess 6,000 of the children.

Lowry of Children's Rights said this time her organization, as well as other independent agencies, will accompany DYFS employees to ensure the evaluations are being done properly.

Davy assumed control over the DYFS reforms Jan. 10, when McGreevey announced he wanted Davy, his management and operations chief, to be the next Human Services commissioner. Deputy Commissioner Colleen Maguire, and her boss, Commissioner Gwendolyn L. Harris, departed last week.

There are clear indications that DYFS is starting to show signs of improvement, Davy said. The state has licensed 107 new foster homes since Jan. 14, just by holding foster parent training when staff conduct home visits.

"We need these kinds of innovative ideas if we are going to give DYFS resources and take the strain off our foster care system," Davy said.

The panel appears to agree, according to its report:

"The commitments made by Commissioner-designate Davy in mid-January represent the first credible plan to address these urgent problems."

Copyright 2004 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

Panel says DYFS no longer lagging

Improvements have taken too long, but the pace is picking up, the N.J. Child Welfare Panel reported.

By Mitch Lipka Inquirer Trento Bureau Feb. 05, 2004

New Jersey's efforts to improve child welfare faltered in several areas, but are heading in the right direction, the panel overseeing the process reported yesterday.

The New Jersey Child Welfare Panel found that the state Division of Youth and Family Services had failed to act quickly, as required by the settlement of a federal lawsuit filed by the advocacy group Children's Rights Inc.

"In some of the areas in which DYFS has made progress, it has taken more time to bring about improvements than we believe should have been necessary," the court-appointed panel reported.

Among those areas were hiring additional staff and reducing caseloads, identified as important actions to better serve children.

The June resolution of Children's Rights' 1999 lawsuit, which alleged the state was harming foster children, is the foundation for the effort to remake DYFS.

The discovery a year ago of the body of a 7-year-old boy who should have been visited by a DYFS caseworker but wasn't hastened the settlement.

Since then, DYFS has been dogged by high-profile failures, including the discovery of four starving adopted brothers in a Collingswood home that caseworkers had visited numerous times over several years.

This week, two foster parents in Clark, N.J., were arrested on allegations that the 13-year-old girl in their care was forced to take meals to a corpse that had been decomposing in the house for weeks. A caseworker had visited a month earlier and given a positive report as part of a statewide assessment of the safety of foster children.

Because of questionable assessments, acting Human Services Commissioner James Davy had already ordered 6,000 of them to be redone under outside supervision.

DYFS was supposed to have taken several steps by October. In addition to increasing staffing, the state was supposed to have added foster homes, eliminated the problem of boarder babies (infants left to live in hospitals), and done the assessments of the living arrangements of foster children.

Since Davy's appointment last month, he has been credited with tackling all of the issues that previous administrators had left hanging.

Much of the blame for delays in meeting the requirements of the settlement - include a blueprint for change that was due to the panel last month - has been heaped on former Commissioner Gwendolyn Harris and Deputy Commissioner Colleen Maguire. Both resigned under pressure. The settlement is now due Feb. 18.

© 2004 Philadelphia Inquirer and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved.

5:107)s bF00j /Span<</ActualText<FEFF00A0>>> BDC (yF00A0>vhia lhia l) .e squiTihat B0A0>vhia ltheir c

both residential treatment and outpatient programs.

The treatment program funding is part of the state's yearlong effort from DYFS. New Jersey is trying to rebuild the division but abuse cases have continued, including one reported this week where authorities say a 15-year-old girl in foster care in Clark was forced to take meals from a room where a dead man's body was decomposing for weeks.

About one-third of all proven abuse or neglect cases each year involve a substance abuse problem, state officials said. The \$10 million is a 33 percent increase over the previous amount spent on state-sponsored addiction programs, Davy said.

"If we can help people beat addictions, they are more likely to have parents who can provide their children with safe and stable homes," Davy said.

The treatment program will be paid for with \$3 million allocated under terms of a class action lawsuit brought by Children's Rights Inc. The state reached a settlement under pressure after a series of horrific abuse cases involving youngsters under supervision of DYFS.

Another \$7 million will come from state and federal welfare funding that is being redirected to parents who are on public assistance and involved with DYFS.

Some of the money will be used to create and expand programs that work with children with mothers who have beaten addiction problems, officials said.

State officials also announced that the Division of Addiction Services will be transferred to the Department of Human Services. Previously, the division was part of the Department of Health and Senior Services.

The division, which employs 122 people and has a \$130 million budget, has offices in Trenton and Newark. It provides funding for more than 250 local agencies and community-based organizations that provide prevention and treatment programs.

Copyright 2004 The Associated Press

RELEASE: February 5 , 2004

Davy Commits \$10 million to treat substance-abusing parents:
DHS to Assume Oversight of Addiction Services

Department of Human Services Acting Commissioner James M. Davy announced that \$10 million will be earmarked to treat drug- and alcohol-abusing parents who are involved with the state child welfare system, a groundbreaking step that helps lay the foundation to reform the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS).

"Despite the fact that substance abuse is a huge factor in child maltreatment, DYFS had relatively little funding committed to treatment for parents – until today," said Davy, during a joint press conference with Clifton R. Lacy, M.D., Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services.

The funds will be used to create 850 new treatment slots for drug- and alcohol-abusing parents who are in danger of losing their children. It is estimated that the influx of treatment dollars will serve about 2500 families in the coming year, said Davy.

The funding increase includes \$3 million previously allocated under settlement of a class-action lawsuit brought by Children's Rights Inc. plus \$7 million in state and federal welfare funds that is being redirected to provide treatment for parents who are both on p33 -1 redirected to pryaltsiC both(o)Tj 8.942 0 TdDYFS.

announced that the Division of Addiction Services, which coordinates and implements substance abuse treatment and prevention services statewide, will be transferred from the Department of Human Services. Governor James E. McGreevey transmitted an executive order to the state legislature on Thursday making the transfer effective.

"It just seems logical that the Department of Human Services assume this function," Davy said. "Thousands of our clients already receive these services, yet many more need them – whether you're talking about people with mental illnesses, parents and individuals on welfare, or parents who are involved with DYFS. This administration feels we can better serve people if this department, which is already monitoring people who need addiction services, takes the lead in determining where and how these services are delivered."

"The transfer of the Division of Addiction Services moves these important services to DHS, where closer integration with DYFS and other DHS programs will result in more efficient service delivery to individuals

The draft plan envisions that intake workers -- those employees who investigate allegations of abuse and neglect -- would accept no more than eight new cases a month. Caseworkers would be limited to a total of 10 families at any one time -- with no more than 10 foster children under their supervision.

The average DYFS caseworker now manages 42 children -- one of the highest caseload averages in the nation.

To meet those limits, the state would need to hire 540 new caseworkers to the existing staff of 1,711, plus 40 "floaters" who would fill in for caseworkers who are on vacation or medical leave.

"This is a tremendous union victory. We have been fighting for this more than 10 years," Hetty Rosenstein, president of Local 1037 of the Communications Workers of America, said yesterday.

She said some intake workers now are assigned 50 to 60 cases to investigate at the same time. Caseworkers supervising 75 or more families are not uncommon, she said.

"There would be no reform without a caseload cap," Rosenstein said.

Supervisors also would have a restricted workload. Frontline supervisors would oversee no more than five caseworkers while the next tier of supervisors would manage no more than three frontline supervisors.

Meeting those limits would require adding 106 new jobs, according to the plan.

The number of clerks who file paperwork and perform data entry tasks would increase. The state would add 155 clerks to the existing 318 to maintain a ratio of one clerk for every six staff members. The state would hire an additional 352 case aides -- one for every five caseworkers to transport children to visits to doctors and their parents. The state now has 90 aides.

Marcia Robinson Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights the advocacy group that sued the state, said she expected the state would have to make "a commitment to substantial new workers and positions is that something the state can tinker with around the edges."

"New workers alone won't make a difference," she added. "They must become a coherent and well-managed system, which doesn't exist right now."

The state loosely modeled its caseload cap after standards set by the child welfare think tank, the Child Welfare League of America. The league recommends, for instance, that one caseworker supervise no more than 15 foster children.

Pamela Day, the league's director of child welfare standards, said states like New Jersey that assign one worker to handle a little bit of everything -- from foster children to children awaiting adoption -- succeed, but only with close supervision and guidance.

"Generalists can do this work, but they have to be highly skilled and trained," Day said.

But she warned that even when states set caseload limits, they still struggle with high rates of turnover.

"States may face problems of recruitment and retention and may not meet the caseload, even though they are trying," Day said.

Copyright 2004 NJ.com. All Rights Reserved.

5:110) 12-FEB-2004 05:51 [John Searight \(search\)](#)

Help for foster parents and drug users

DYFS reform boosts stipends and adds treatment opportunities

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO

Star-Ledger Staff

February 12, 2004

The state would raise the monthly allowance for foster parents by more than 40 percent and provide 2,200 new drug treatment openings for addicted parents over the next five years under the latest draft of its plan to overhaul the Division of Youth and Family Services.

Teenage foster children -- the most often-overlooked segment of the child welfare population -- would see a boost in services to help them find permanent homes and prepare for life on their own when they reach adulthood, according to the plan.

State officials have privately estimated the first-year cost of soft-ordered reforms at the troubled child protection agency at more than \$125 million. The latest draft of the plan, dated Monday and obtained by the Star-Ledger last night, puts the cost of expanded drug treatment at \$57 million and the additional services for teens at \$10 million, but lacks many other specifics about costs.

Acting Human Services Commissioner James Davy said yesterday the plan is very much a "fluid" document, and with a week to spare before Feb. 18 due date, "we will use every minute to get it done." He declined comment on specifics of the plan before it is completed.

Davy did offer a progress report on ongoing changes he's making at the agency. He said it has closed 2,056 of a backlog of 6,000 cases involving children identified as being in safe hands and no longer in need of state intervention. DYFS also has licensed 126 new foster homes in a month and an additional 200 potential foster parents are undergoing home reviews and training.

Gov. James E. McGreevey's administration agreed to overhaul the agency to settle a class-action civil rights lawsuit on behalf of foster children brought by Children's Rights Inc. of New York. Settlement last summer requires the state to present a reform plan to a report panel monitoring the reforms.

Highlights of the draft plan include:

Significant raises in the monthly stipends for foster parents as well as relatives raising orphaned or mistreated children. For the first time, relatives would earn the same amount of money as nonrelated foster parents.

Currently, the "board rate" paid to foster parents starts at \$420 for youngest children and rises to \$500 for teens. "Kinship homes," in which children are placed with relatives, receive a flat \$250 per child.

The plan calls for gradual increases in those rates, the first year. The rate for the youngest children, for example, would rise to \$594 a month -- a 41 percent increase for foster parents, and more than what relatives now receive. The plan also leaves room to adjust the monthly fees higher over time.

Doing so would "more accurately reflect the cost of raising a child in New Jersey," according to the plan. "People willing to consider foster and adoptive parenthood should be respected, honored and supported throughout the process."

A dramatic expansion of drug treatment programs for addicted parents as well as teenagers under DYFS supervision.

Davy last week announced a \$10 million push to add 760 outpatient and inpatient beds this year, but the administration's long-term plan goes much further. The plan proposes adding 1,420 additional long- and short-term treatment beds over the next four years. The plan also contemplates adding 125 inpatient and 625 outpatient openings for teenagers over the next five years.

Expanded services for teenagers under the care of DYFS.

DYFS officials would keep teenagers' cases open past the age of 18 if they choose, automatically enroll every teen

leaving the system in Medicaid, and develop 200 transitional living units over the next five years. Every DYFS office will train several workers to specialize in adolescent care and make a concerted push toward finding adolescents adoptive homes "until at least their 16th birthdays." Those willing to adopt teens would qualify for a one-time tax credit, respite care and mental health services in the home.

"Like many other child welfare systems, New Jersey is reluctant to acknowledge adolescents' abuse and neglect, and permit them to enter the system even when they desperately need to -- thus consigning them to situations that can include homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction, dealing and prostitution," the plan says.

The DYFS plan, as previously reported in The Star-Ledger, also includes hiring 1,100 new employees to reduce caseloads.

Human Services officials also envision changing the way caseworkers investigate abuse and assist troubled families. Some workers would be assigned to investigate abuse and receive extensive forensic training, while others would focus on "permanency," assisting birth, foster and adoptive families in providing stable homes.

"Separating the protective and permanency functions will also improve ability to coordinate with law enforcement and medical providers in cases of severe maltreatment which may require criminal prosecution," the report said.

Those few who have seen the draft plan generally praised the effort.

"I am impressed with the scope of the plan," said Cecilia Zalkin, executive director of the child advocacy group, the Association for

The draft calls for the state to hire a DYFS medical director by the pediatrician would oversee health, mental-health and substance-abuse policies as well as medical programs.

The plan calls for hiring 32 nurses and four nurse practitioners in January. Currently, 27 nurses are on staff. Nurses would be on call around the clock.

"One of the more glaring deficiencies was the lack of attention paid to the medical needs of the children," Facciarossa said. "It's clear the plan needs to address those needs - needs to deliver mainstream medical care to ensure children are accessing medical care."

"The fact that DYFS has not had a medical director for some time underscores the fact that the medical needs of the children have not been a priority."

Foster parents and caseworkers have complained for years about the system of hunting for doctors who accept Medicaid. Under the proposal, the state would pay doctors who accept

unsteady finances, according to a report released on Thursday by the independent child advocate, Kevin Ryan

In fact, the report said, the state's child welfare policy in general is poorly understood or ignored by workers that it is "almost meaningless."

The Jacksons, who are free on bail while they face charges of neglect, claimed that the boys' scrawny bodies and brittle health stemmed from birth defects and eating disorders. But the state found that the children unmistakably starved. Detailed medical examinations showed evidence of disease or disorders, Mr. Ryan said at a news conference here on Thursday, and all four boys have made remarkable gains in both weight and height since their discovery on Oct. 10, when a neighbor of the Jacksons in Collingswood, near Philadelphia, noticed the oldest boy, 1, rooting through the trash for food.

The report amounts to the latest and perhaps most damning portrait of a welfare system that Gov. James E. McGreevey and others - including the agency itself, the Division of Youth and Family Services - conceded had been broken almost beyond comprehension. The death of William Williams, a 7-year-old foster child whose body was found hidden in a Newark basement in January 2003, spurred widespread calls for change. Mr. McGreevey to create the post of child advocate. Although the state eventually agreed last June to a complete overhaul of the agency to settle a federal lawsuit condemning its foster care system, the new report raises questions about a key component of that effort: the agency's claim, days before the Jackson boys were discovered, that it had admitted 14,000 children in its care, one of the terms of the settlement.

"Our investigation has concluded that in a substantial number of cases involving the Jackson case," Mr. Ryan said, "DYFS simply did not require or conduct face-to-face safety assessments for hundreds, if not thousands of children." He noted that those instances involved children being supervised by the state's nine Adoption Resource Centers, regional offices that had monitored the Jacksons at various times.

Taken in sum, Mr. Ryan said, the report raises questions about the effectiveness of policy reform at the agency, and leads to "the very unsettling conclusion that policies designed to protect children are not strictly adhered to at DYFS and have not been for many years."

"They're not even fully understood in the DYFS offices," he continued, "and this raises inevitable questions that concern whether this system is so debilitated to support its own policies."

Marcia Robinson Lowry, the leader of the group that sued the state for its foster care system, said her organization was so troubled by the revelation about visits never made that it would step up its oversight.

"I am really shocked," said Ms. Lowry, executive director of Child Rights Inc., an advocacy group based in Manhattan. "Either people were purposely flouting a federal court order or the depths of their incompetence was so profound that people didn't know what they were supposed to do."

The leader of the union representing many of New Jersey's workers, Hetty Rosenstein, said on Thursday that workers in the Adoption Resource Centers were told that they did not have to conduct face-to-face interviews with children in their adoptive homes, but could base safety reviews on previous visits. She said the agency was overburdened and needed more staff members, training and technology to do a proper job.

James M. Davy, the acting commissioner of the State Department of Human Services, which includes the child welfare agency, said he planned to meet with Mr. Ryan to discuss the report and had ordered an immediate review of visits questioned in the report. Any child whom workers had failed to check up on will be visited, he said.

"I am satisfied that the safety assessments we are currently doing are being done in person and are being done correctly," Mr. Davy said in a statement.

The report spells out in disturbing detail how caseworkers failed to recognize the severity of the Jackson boys' condition.

"The department said they conducted visits June through October, and that is simply inaccurate. It didn't happen in this case and hundreds, not thousands, of others," Ryan said at a news conference in New York City yesterday with staff and senior members of the law firm Latham & Watkins, which donated its services in the preparation of the report.

"The testimony from the eight high-level officials from the Department of Human Services strongly suggests there was a great lack of clarity, even at the highest levels, about what was required of the field workers conducting the safety assessments," Ryan said.

Acting Human Services Commissioner James Davy immediately vowed to ensure that staff visit the foster children who had not been seen last summer, and to investigate what went wrong.

"This report raises a number of serious concerns, not the least of which is that safety assessments conducted last year for children in pre-adoptive foster homes may have been done incorrectly," Davy said in a prepared statement. "I have ordered a complete review of how safety assessments were conducted during the time period in question."

The state had agreed to conduct face-to-face assessments of every foster care as part of the settlement of a federal lawsuit brought by Children's Rights Inc. The state also promised to produce a plan for a complete overhaul of DYFS by Jan. 18, but missed that deadline. Children's Rights agreed to a Feb. 18 extension.

Had Davy not pledged full cooperation, attorneys at Children's Rights would have dragged the state back to court to make sure the assessments were done, said Marcia Robinson Lowry, the advocacy group's executive director.

"This is a violation of the settlement agreement ... This is appalling," Lowry said.

"We do not have a lot of faith in this process," Lowry said. "We have a lot of questions about these assessments, and we want a comprehensive report within three weeks to see how this is going. If it is not going forward, we will take additional steps."

Part of the controversy and confusion can be tracked to a June 20 memo from Deputy Director for Program Operations Beth McGinnis, describing how the safety assessments of foster children ought to be done. McGinnis launched the assessment process weeks before the June 23 settlement.

"I am directing that for all children in foster care ... kinship/relative care, we affirm that we have documented in the child's case record that a safety assessment has taken place during the previous six months," the memo said.

09/18/2016 9:47:05 AM] Davunicis, desW3 0 Td1.12

Part of the contro Ds (")TChildrent is

Investigator issues scathing DYFS report

By MATT KATZ and BILL DUHART Courier-Post Staff NEWARK February 13, 2004

The systemic problems within the Division of Youth and Family Services have their roots in two problems - managers' failure to communicate procedures and caseworkers' failure to implement them. That was the essence of a report by the state's Office of the Child Advocate after a two-month investigation. The report that child advocate Kevin Ryan issued Thursday calls for major changes within DYFS requiring an infusion of funds. But Ryan finds less fault with existing procedures than with the agency's failure to carry them out. In analyzing the case of Vanessa

including forbidding home-schooling for foster children.

Some policy changes reflect Ryan's concerns. According to Davy, everyone in the household must be interviewed when a foster home license is up for approval or when a safety assessment is conducted. Safety assessments also require a check of housekeeping standards, including sufficient food.

Despite these procedural changes, Ryan's major concern is that existing procedures are not followed because of lack of communication and failure of implementation.

"This is simply a matter of the division following its own policies and procedures," he said. Management breakdown

The fault for this lies with management, according to Hetty Rosenstein, president of a union representing DYFS workers. She said workers - nine of whom have been suspended in the fallout from the Jackson case - were new; they had to examine medical reports of children in the home.

"We are holding individuals responsible at the lowest level when people at the highest level were apparently indifferent, uncaring, or lying," she said.

A spokesman for Gov. James E. McGreevey said he is looking forward to reading Ryan's report, and any change at DYFS would likely require a budget increase this year.

The Camden County Prosecutor's Office is also reviewing the report. Charges against Raymond and Vanessa Jackson are pending, and the office is investigating further charges against other state workers, a spokesman said.

DYFS's own report on the Jackson case is expected to be released next week.

Locally, Michael Byrd, the neighbor who called police in October after finding Bruce Jackson rummaging through his trash, said he hopes people never forget.

At the time, Bruce stood 4 feet tall and weighed 45 pounds - lighter than Byrd's 10-year-old child. Today, Bruce is 82 pounds and more than 142 feet tall.

"Anyone with a heart should care about these kids," said Byrd, 36. "I don't want this story to go quietly."

Starvation Report Blames N.J.

Child advocate: The system failed four Jackson brothers "every step of the way."

By Mitch Lipka and Troy Graham Inquirer Staff Writers Feb. 13, 2004

NEWARK, N.J. - New Jersey's system to protect children from abuse neglected instead perpetuated it - allowing the four Jackson brothers to endure years of starvation, according to a report on the state's child welfare system.

The state Division of Youth and Family Services exhibited years of dysfunction in the case, failing time and again to follow its own rules and leaving the brothers in harm's way, reported the 52-page investigation. Hundreds of pages of supporting documentation - released yesterday by the New Jersey Office of the Child Advocate.

"In short, every step of the way, the New Jersey child welfare system failed these four boys," the report said.

Had basic rules about foster homes - Raymond and Vanessa Jackson both foster and adopted children in their Collingswood family - been followed, the brothers likely would have been removed years ago. Child Advocate Kevin Ryan, whose office was created last year to investigate problems in the state's child-welfare system and suggest change.

"The distinction between policy and practice is so great as to make DYFS's written rules almost meaningless," the report concluded.

Even after Bruce Jackson's school raised the first red flag in 1995, noting that he might be malnourished, DYFS workers sought no medical input and did not object when Vanessa Jackson began to home-school him the next year.

Repeatedly, DYFS workers also took Vanessa Jackson's word when issues were raised about the brothers' development. In fact, workers did not follow up with doctors or notice that regular medical care for the boys ceased in 1997, the report said.

Although DYFS workers were in the Jacksons' Camden County homes, usually regarding foster children, the four adopted sons were rarely seen.

Raymond and Vanessa Jackson face an array of criminal charges regarding the treatment of the brothers.

Richard Josselson, Raymond Jackson's attorney, suggested that officials turning an innocent family into a scapegoat for political reasons. "Everything they're doing is a public gesture," he said. "It's a sensational case they can hang their hat on. It's something the governor can make a big deal about, say, 'Look how I reformed DYFS.' "

Josselson said that the level of systemic incompetence detailed in the report was impossible, and that things had been massively blown out of proportion.

"Come on, you're in that house, and you don't notice these children in awful condition? DYFS wasn't that blind."

Because of the Jackson case, children in foster care in New Jersey are no longer allowed to be home-schooled. All occupants of foster homes must be interviewed for license renewal, and medical care must be tracked.

Ryan said the state Department of Human Services had publicly presented that workers had in-person encounters last year to assess the safety of 14,000 children when "hundreds, if not thousands including the Jacksons - were not seen.

"That's appalling," the child advocate said. "The administration has responsibility to ensure the safety of all the children in its care."

Children not seen were those awaiting adoption.

The assessments were required under the settlement last year of a lawsuit against the state filed by the advocacy group Children's Rights Inc.

DYFS was scheduled to present its rebuilding plan to a special-appointed panel Jan. 20, but missed that deadline. The agency-overhaul plan will be released Wednesday.

The two top officials overseeing the changes, Human Services Commissioner Gwendolyn Harris and Deputy Commissioner Colleen Maguire, have resigned.

James Davy, appointed last month to take over for Harris, has instituted many changes and pledged yesterday to work with Ryan to address issues raised by the report.

"Any safety assessments that were not done in person will be redone," Davy promised.

The only response from the state came in Davy's statement. Neither Davy nor DYFS director Edward Cotton would take questions on the report.

Children's Rights attorney Eric Thompson said it was disappointing to how fouled up the safety assessments had been.

"We already knew after the Jackson case that the safety assessments were flawed," he said. "Now it's clear... many of them never occurred."

Thompson said Davy told him Wednesday that safety assessments would be conducted on all 1,700 children in the adoption system who needed to be placed. He and others blame some of the failings to reexamine those homes to get children adopted.

In the DYFS safety assessment for the Jacksons, a caseworker consulted with the parents and completed a form. The worker's supervisor signed the form.

Nine DYFS workers and supervisors were fired over the case and ~~be~~ under criminal investigation. However, union officials said that ~~while~~ workers might have made some errors, they had broken no laws.

Ryan's report noted that four DYFS workers who evaluated the Jacksons ~~eight~~ times between 1991 and 2002 failed to follow policies requiring medical examinations that could have caught the problems.

Hetty Rosenstein, president of a union representing DYFS workers, ~~said~~ it was management's decision to waive those medical exams.

The four brothers were pulled from the Jacksons' home after the ~~10-year-old~~ Bruce Jackson, was found scavenging for food in garbage cans ~~in a~~ nearby alley.

Raymond and Vanessa Jackson asserted that the brothers had ~~disasters~~, but all have thrived since being removed from their home in ~~October~~.

The cumulative weight of the four has gone from 136 pounds to ~~241~~ pounds. The other brothers are Keith, 14; Tyrone, 10; and Michael, 9.

"The facts strongly suggest that [the brothers] were systematically ~~abused~~ over many years," the report said.

DYFS workers did not follow their own regulations that each member of a household receive a medical evaluation and in-person interview each year. DYFS officials interviewed by the Office of the Child Advocate said ~~they~~ not even realize these steps were required.

DYFS may be "too debilitated to support its own policies," the report ~~said~~.

Caseworkers also were required to get a medical report and conduct ~~interview~~ for each member of a household when parents adopt a child from the foster-care system.

Caseworkers would have been required to do both in March and December ~~1997~~ and October 2000, as the Jacksons adopted children from the foster-care system. Bruce Jackson, the first, would have had a ~~medical~~ and an interview on all three occasions.

But DYFS workers did not conduct medical evaluations or interviews.

DYFS officials also continually signed off on an adoption subsidy ~~Jacksons~~ were entitled to as long as they certified that they provided at least half of the children's financial support. The agency approved ~~subsidies~~ annually based solely on the Jacksons' word. On their 2001 ~~tax~~ returns, the Jacksons reported just \$11,000 in income - "a far cry from the \$80,000 noted by the caseworker."

ted that four DYFS wuwRyupt00 n8m125 To debixM, the Q BT tionse a2

