

PRESS RELEASE

For Release on Thursday, January 5, 2017

The Office of the Child Advocate is an independent, autonomous state agency tasked with the immense responsibility of protecting the legal rights of children involved with the Department of Children, Youth and Families, to promote policies and practices, which ensure that children are safe, that children have permanent and stable families, and that children in out of home placements have their physical, mental, medical, educational, emotional, and behavioral needs met. The Office of the Child Advocate functions as the watchdog to the Department of Children, Youth and Families.

On October 27, 2016, the State's Child Advocate, Jennifer Griffith, announced that she convened a panel of community professionals to conduct a multidisciplinary review of the death of a seven month old infant. This child was not in state custody at the time of the fatality, but was previously involved in a case that was open to the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). In addition, Ms. Griffith announced that the panel would review the near-fatality of another seven month old child. In accordance with a new state law, R.I.G.L. § 42-73-2.3, enacted on July 6, 2016, the Office of the Child Advocate must convene a review panel after notification by DCYF of a child death or near fatality known to the Department. The Office of the Child Advocate must issue a press release, publicly announcing the convening of this panel. Griffith asked the following individuals from a previous review panel to return to the newly convened group: Dr. Adam Pallant, a pediatrician at Hasbro Children's Hospital; Ken Fandetti, a retired DCYF administrator; and Darlene Allen, Executive Director of Adoption Rhode Island. Ms. Griffith has appointed new members to serve on the panel, including: Attorney Janet Gilligan, Deputy Director of Rhode Island Legal Services and former legal counsel for the Department of Children, Youth and Families; Attorney Molly Kapstein Cote, a former Attorney General and a criminal defense attorney; Lisa Guillette, Executive Director of Foster Forward and Detective Michael Iacone, a Cranston Special Victims Unit Detective. In addition to the eight community members, Griffith, along with two members of her staff, Attorney Katelyn Medeiros and Senior Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, Kathryn Cortes, will serve as advising members of the review panel.

On December 28, 2016, the Office of the Child Advocate issued another press release to announce that the Office received notice of an additional child fatality of a two month old infant. This child was not in state custody at the time of the fatality, however DCYF had prior contact with the family. The child fatality panel had yet to complete their review of the initial two cases before receiving notice of the unfortunate death of this infant. Therefore, the Office of the Child Advocate issued a statement to announce that we incorporated this third case into our current review.

Unfortunately, the Office of the Child Advocate is issuing an additional press release today to announce that we have received notice from the Department of Children, Youth and Families that a near fatality of an 18 month old infant has occurred. This child was not in state custody at the time of the fatality, however DCYF had prior contact with the family. The Office of the Child Advocate is issuing this statement to announce that we will be incorporating this fourth case into our current review, therefore, we will not be concluding the work of the Child Fatality Review Panel at this time.

Upon the conclusion of the review, the Office of the Child Advocate will issue a public report outlining the panel's findings and recommendations, without identifying the children or families involved in the cases under review.