

# CHILDREN'S SAFETY NET ACTION PLAN

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## Philadelphia Department of Human Services

### **Background:**

The protection of Philadelphia's at-risk children from abuse and neglect is the highest priority of the Philadelphia's Department of Human Services (DHS). Accordingly, and at the direction of Mayor John F. Street, DHS is taking immediate action to ensure the safety of all of the children in its care.

On November 2, 2006, Mayor John F. Street issued an Executive Order creating the Child Welfare Review Panel, which is charged with conducting a comprehensive review of the Department of Human Services, including a systemic case record review of abuse and neglect fatalities in Philadelphia since the beginning of 2002. The Review Panel will deliver its final report in May 2007.

DHS has begun to take immediate actions to ensure child safety. The Children's Safety Net Action Plan is the framework that DHS will follow to immediately assess service delivery gaps and strengthen internal and external controls that will lead to the improved safety of Philadelphia's most vulnerable citizens, our children. DHS' Children's Safety Net Action Plan is designed to address issues already identified in advance of the final report issued by the Child Welfare Review Panel.

The "Action Plan" is DHS' immediate response to the problems at hand, both within the agency and within its contract service provider network. It is not intended to usurp or in any way influence the findings and decisions of the newly established Child Welfare Review Panel. DHS will, however, work closely with the Panel and share all information, reports and recommendations described below.

### **Overview:**

There are four main components of the Children's Safety Net Action Plan (herein referred to as the "Action Plan"): immediately ensuring the safety and well-being of all children in the DHS system by conducting internal quality service reviews, improving provider oversight, and increasing transparency and accountability. DHS will take a comprehensive look at its own operations, as well as reviewing the operations of its provider agencies.

DHS will accomplish its Action Plan in two phases: phase 1 (described in detail below) will focus on ensuring the immediately safety and well-being of all children in the DHS system and the appropriate functioning of its in-home services. Phase 2 will focus on other critical policies and practices, including, for example, strengthening the information court social workers have available to them in courtrooms.

## **I Ensure Safety and Well-being of All Children in the DHS System**

### **A. Conduct a Safety and Well-Being Visit to Every Child**

- A. DHS social work staff will conduct a face-to-face safety and well-being visit of every child in every family receiving services from DHS. Cases will be prioritized based on the age of children and type of service. Children receiving in-home services will be visited first, followed by children in placement. Among in-home services, SCOH (Services in Children's Own Home) levels 2 and 3 cases in which there is a child under the age of 6 will be reviewed first and all of these reviews will take place within the next 30 days.

During each in-home visit, DHS social workers will:

1. Assess the safety and risk factors of each child living in the home.
2. Inquire about visits from the SCOH provider
3. Take necessary action to strengthen the safety response
4. Provide information about DHS, the provider, and family responsibilities to ensure child safety (see below under accountability).

The DHS Acting Commissioner will closely monitor progress through reports that detail the numbers of visits, the outcomes of the assessments, and any changes in services that result from the visits. All visits will be completed within 3 months, and the results of the visits will be shared with the newly established Child Welfare Review Panel and other stakeholders.

## **II Conduct Internal Quality Service Reviews**

### **A. Assess DHS Units in which there was a Child Death**

### **B. Review Status of Death Review Recommendations**

- A. The Department will conduct a Quality Service Review (QSR) for a sample of SCOH cases in the five DHS units that had child deaths in their caseloads. The reviews will rely on both internal and external reviewers who have been trained in the QSR process and will utilize the state's own review instrument.
- B. DHS will review all recommendations that resulted from the past five years of death reviews and assess implementation status. The Department will also look at the process for disseminating and implementing the recommendations from death reviews to ensure the organization makes systemic changes as warranted.

## **III Improve Provider Oversight and Monitoring**

### **A. Evaluate All SCOH Providers**

### **B. Enhance Provider Monitoring and Oversight**

- A. Frank Petrus through the Center for the Support of Families is developing a methodology for and will be conducting reviews of all SCOH providers.

Providers that had child deaths in their caseload during 2004 – 2006 will undergo in-depth reviews and will be evaluated first. Evaluations will consider agency performance data from a broad range of sources, including Program Evaluation Unit, Quality Service Review (QSR), Family Assessment Form (FAF), and the CAPE Investigation Unit. Recommendations from the reviews of these agencies will be delivered by the end of 2006 to the Acting Commissioner for immediate action.

- B. Enhance Provider Monitoring: The CAPE Unit is responsible for monitoring DHS provider services. Every provider is evaluated once a year and evaluations include site visits and client interviews. In order to enhance the level of monitoring, CAPE will augment its monitoring processes. Improved monitoring may include using data from the QSR, FAF, death reviews, and any investigations conducted by the Investigation Unit.

#### **IV Increase Transparency and Accountability**

- A. Enhance the departmental Ombudsperson Position**
  - B. Reinstitute the Child Welfare Advisory Committee**
  - C. Distribute a SCOH Handbook to families**
  - D. Solicit Community Feedback**
  - E. Solicit DHS Staff Feedback**
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- A. This Ombudsperson office will be strengthened in its ability to review complaints about DHS services. Complaints will be directed to the office from the consumer hotline, from DHS staff and other sources.
  - B. DHS will reinstitute the Child Welfare Advisory Committee in early 2007 to provide ongoing feedback about DHS operations and services. DHS will ensure that the Committee has parent, foster parent, youth advocate, academic, and provider participation.
  - C. DHS will develop and distribute a “SCOH Handbook” describing what a family can expect of its DHS and SCOH workers (frequency of visits, content of those visits, etc.) and what families are responsible for as SCOH participants. The Handbook will include the DHS Consumer Line phone number, which can be called if there are issues or concerns about services. (See below for more information on the Consumer Line.)
  - D. DHS will augment its current consumer phone line by having a social worker handle each call in person. DHS will publicize the consumer feedback line by including it in literature, particularly consumer literature, and by encouraging calls regarding concerns related to service delivery. Advocates, providers and other community members will be encouraged to use this mechanism. Depending on the nature of the service concern, calls may be handled by the ombudsperson or the CAPE Investigations Unit.

E. In order to ensure that staff feedback is reviewed appropriately and expeditiously, DHS will:

- Remind all staff about the provider concern form, which is used to request an investigation into a particular case. These concerns are handled by the CAPE Investigation Unit (see above regarding enhancements to the Unit).
- Establish a [dhscommissioner@phila.gov](mailto:dhscommissioner@phila.gov) email account for feedback and suggestions for improvement. Any DHS employee can provide input directly to the commissioner through this mechanism. DHS will adhere to a strict policy about protection for “whistleblowers”
- A Suggestion Box will be available for staff members who wish to provide input anonymously. Reward Innovation: On a quarterly basis, employees will be recognized with the DHS Innovator Award for their suggestions that improve services or efficiency in DHS.