

# NEWS



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## Department of Human Services

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**Anne Marie Ambrose,  
Commissioner**

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### **Response to the verdicts in the Danieal Kelly trial**

The verdicts in the murder trial of Danieal Kelly represent the closing of a sad chapter in the history of the Department of Human Services said DHS Commissioner, Anne Marie Ambrose. However, she says it also underscores the many reforms DHS has made in the years since Kelly's death that have vastly improved the safety and well being of Philadelphia's children.

Mayor Michael A. Nutter agrees and commended DHS on the tremendous progress the agency has made in its reform efforts since the tragic events that led to Kelly's death. "The death of Danieal Kelly was a terrible tragedy. The loss of any child touches our entire city," said Mayor Nutter. "Since 2006, DHS has worked tirelessly to become more effective, responsive and does a far better job of protecting our city's more vulnerable children. Commissioner Ambrose has promoted a culture of responsibility that places the safety of children first."

DHS' reform efforts have also been lauded by the Community Oversight Board, (COB), an independent, multidisciplinary panel of child welfare experts convened by the Mayor to monitor DHS. In its 2011 report, the COB noted that "DHS reforms of the last three years have led to increased child safety and to improved fairness in the decision making process for families."

According to Ambrose, since Kelly's death, DHS management and staff have worked tirelessly to implement a host of new policies and practices aimed at improving the quality and effectiveness of the agency.

Over the past five years, DHS has embraced a Safety Model of Practice, which incorporates child safety into all aspects of decision making throughout the Department's involvement with a family. It also implemented an In-Home Safety Assessment tool, which assists social workers in better identifying safety threats to children living in their own homes and determining the level of services most appropriate to meet their needs.

In addition, the Department has increased accountability and improved the way it measures outcomes for children through the establishment of the Division of Performance Management and Accountability (PMA). This division also closely monitors the quality of services rendered by provider agencies. In 2008, PMA developed a Quality Service Review to assess DHS' performance in specific services areas and identify systemic improvements for both DHS and its provider agencies.

"Quality Service Review is a powerful tool for system reform," says Ambrose, "because it is designed to stimulate action to improve practice results at all levels of the department."

DHS has also established teams to review child fatalities and near fatalities and makes recommendations to prevent child abuse and neglect. These recommendations, which are forwarded to the Mayor of Philadelphia and the Department of Public Welfare, are assigned to DHS managers for implementation and are tracked to ensure compliance.

The Department is also better able to meet the needs of medically fragile children like Kelly. In 2010, it hired a child abuse expert Dr. Cindy Christian as a part time medical director to ensure effective management of the medical needs of children on both an individual and systemic level and to consult with staff on medically complex cases. It also hired nurse consultants who make home visits to medically fragile children during investigations and when children are receiving in-home services. The Department also added Kate Maus, formerly of the Department of Public Health, to direct its Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) program, which provides services to families with infants born with drug or alcohol exposure.

In acknowledgment of its accomplishments in all these areas, DHS recently received its first unrestricted full license from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare since 2007. Ambrose notes that while recognition of the agency's hard work is gratifying, the agency's reform effort is not over. "DHS is moving forward and will continue to enhance its policies and practices to better protect and improve the lives of the children we serve," she says.

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