

OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

+-----+  
| LOCAL COMMISSIONERS MEMORANDUM |  
+-----+

OCFS-4616EL (Rev. 11/98)

Transmittal No: 00 OCFS LCM-20

Date: August 22, 2000

Division: Development and  
Prevention Services

TO: Local District Commissioners

SUBJECT: 1999 Child Fatalities, Annual Cumulative  
Report

ATTACHMENTS: 1999 Child Fatalities, Annual Cumulative  
Report (not available on-line)

The purpose of this memorandum is to share with you the 1999 Child Fatalities, Annual Cumulative Report.

This report was prepared by the Office of Children and Family Services pursuant to Social Services Law 20(5) and sent to Governor Pataki and the NYS Legislature. This report contains aggregate information derived from the Office's review of child fatality cases which involve:

- ° Reports to the State Central Register for Child Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR) alleging that a child or children had died as the result of abuse and/or maltreatment at the hands of a caretaker; and
- ° Children who died while in the care and custody or custody and guardianship of a local social services district or other authorized agency.

Because of the relatively small number of children represented in this report, care must be taken in reviewing percentages. Differences of one or two children can result in seemingly significant differences in percentages. At the same time, I acknowledge that although these fatalities represent a small subset of all the children that we serve, one child's death is too many.

Date: August 22, 2000

Trans. No. OCFS LCM-20

Page No. 2

With those caveats, however, I would like to direct your attention to what I consider some key observations from the data:

- o Of the 42 foster care fatality cases (43 children), 33 cases were not suspicious and therefore not reported to the SCR. In fact in the majority of cases (23 of the 42 cases, or 55%) the child was determined to have died from natural causes. However, in four foster care cases the child's death was attributed, at least in part, to child abuse or maltreatment.

The child welfare system must be ever vigilant of foster home placements - home studies, criminal record checks, references, matching, monitoring and case management of these placements - and attend to the safety of the children in our care.

- o Of the 133 cases reported to the SCR alleging the abuse/maltreatment death of a child, 56 occurred in New York City and 77 occurred in counties outside NYC. Of these 133 cases, 89 were indicated and 44 were unfounded. However, in slightly more than half (45) of these indicated SCR fatalities, the family had been known to the local child welfare system. This should concern us all.

While I understand that child fatalities in active or closed cases are traumatic to staff as well as families, we must not let that dissuade us from using those cases to teach us how we can prevent future deaths in our caseloads. I strongly encourage each district to establish some sort of review procedure - Child Fatality Review Team, interdisciplinary teams, internal administrative review processes, etc. - to retrospectively review deaths of children known to their child welfare system.

Accordingly I would draw your attention to the section "Recent Enhancements and Future Recommendations" which outlines some of the actions that have occurred and some of the directions the Office will be taking in the coming year to enhance child welfare practice in New York State.

I welcome any suggestions that you or your staff may have for how we collectively can improve child welfare case practice and systems, and perhaps, prevent future child deaths. Please direct those suggestions to the appropriate Regional Office Director listed below.

Date: August 22, 2000

Trans. No. OCFS LCM-20

Page No. 3

Any questions concerning this release should be directed to the Regional Office Director for your region:

<u>Office</u>	<u>Director</u>	<u>Phone Number</u>
Buffalo	Linda C. Brown	(716) 847-3145
Rochester	Linda Kurtz	(716) 238-8201
Syracuse	Jack Klump	(315) 423-1200
Albany	William McLaughlin	(518) 486-7078
Yonkers	Pat Sheehy	(914) 377-2080
NYC	Gail Hallerdin	(212) 383-1788

Thank you for your continued cooperation.

---

Donald K. Smith  
Deputy Commissioner  
Division of Development and  
Prevention Services