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Press Release

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Contract for Independent Review of DCYF Approved by Governor and Council

CONCORD – In a bipartisan vote, the Executive Council today approved a contract for an independent review of the child protective services of the Division of Children Youth and Families (DCYF) that Governor Maggie Hassan directed in order to ensure that the State of New Hampshire is providing the best protection for children in child abuse and neglect cases.

In response to concerns raised by law enforcement after the murder of a Manchester toddler last year and an initial review by the Department of Justice, Governor Hassan announced that the State would undertake a comprehensive, independent review, which – following today's approval of the contract – will be conducted by the Center for the Support of Families (CSF).

"Our society rests on the fundamental principle that all children must be able to grow up in a safe environment, and in the rare instances where their families harm them, we must protect them," Governor Hassan said. "Any missed opportunity to save a child's life is a tragedy, and we must always be working to ensure that we are doing everything in our power to prevent such a tragedy in the future."

The review by CSF will focus on child health, child safety and risk of harm, and will include reviews of DCYF cases and processes, as well as consultation with the Legislative Commission to Review Child Abuse Fatalities.

"Every child deserves the opportunity to grow and learn in a safe and caring environment," Governor Hassan said. "The Center for Support of Families has worked with the federal government and other states on child welfare, and their comprehensive investigation will help ensure that New Hampshire is using best practices to ensure the safety and well-being of our children."

Located in Maryland, CSF and its staff have worked with the United States Department of Health Human Services, as well as state agencies in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi and Washington. More than half of the contract will be paid with federal funds, and approximately \$96,000 will be paid for using general funds.

The review will examine and analyze DCYF's practices and capacity to protect the health, safety and life of children under its care, using a problem-solving approach that uses data and qualitative information to define problems and to identify solutions.

"I welcome this independent review to identify improvements to DCYF practices and capacity to safeguard the children of New Hampshire," said Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Commissioner Jeffrey A. Meyers. "I know the DCYF staff to be extremely hard working and committed to the goal of protecting children from abuse and neglect. We are confident that this review will identify new solutions to ensure safe and healthy outcomes for the children who are under DCYF's care."

As part of the review design, CSF will review 100 randomly selected DCYF cases, including allegations of maltreatment at the intake level that were determined to be unfounded; reports of maltreatment of children in which investigations were opened; and cases involving children and families that were ongoing during a specified period of time.

The review will also look at systemic factors, including DCYF processes, investigation skills, training, supervision of staff, caseloads, legal process and relationships with stakeholders.

The contract lasts until December 31, 2016, and CSF's report will be due 30-60 days from the completion of the

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review.

In preparation for the review, the Department of Justice has partnered with DCYF to provide training so that case workers can better identify potential crimes when evaluating cases of abuse and neglect.

As part of these ongoing efforts to improve child safety, DHHS has presented a plan to the Legislative Commission to Review Child Abuse Fatalities to allow for 24-hour, seven-day a week responses to reports of child abuse.

In addition, the commission and the department have worked on several other initiatives that the state Senate is scheduled to vote on tomorrow and that the Governor supports, including a bill that would allow DHHS to retain records of reports of abuse or neglect for longer periods of time and a measure that would extend the time period for hearings regarding children taken into protective custody, require law enforcement to notify DHHS of the hearing and extend the commission.

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