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Press Release



For Immediate Release

June 6, 2016

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Governor Hassan Signs Bipartisan Child Protection Bills

CONCORD – Continuing her efforts to ensure the safety and well-being of New Hampshire's children, Governor Maggie Hassan today signed three bipartisan bills aimed at strengthening child protection in New Hampshire.

Joined by children's advocates, Senator David Boutin and members of the Commission to Review Child Abuse Fatalities – which was created by bipartisan legislation that the Governor signed last year and recommended the bills – Governor Hassan signed Senate Bill 536, relative to emergency interim relief under the child protection act; Senate Bill 538, relative to children taken into custody under the child protection act and relative to the commission to review child abuse fatalities; and Senate Bill 539, relative to access to records under the child protection act.

"Our society rests on the fundamental principle that every child should be able to grow up in a safe environment, and we must always be working to protect our children," Governor Hassan said. "Any missed opportunity to save a child's life is a tragedy, and we must do everything in our power to prevent such a tragedy in the future. Following recent tragedies, we launched an outside, independent review to ensure that the Division of Children Youth and Families is using best practices, and these bipartisan bills will build on that effort and help strengthen protections for our children."

Senate Bill 536 allows workers for the Division of Children Youth and Families (DCYF) to seek an ex-parte court order for the immediate removal of a child deemed to be in imminent danger and allows testimony for such an order to be given over the phone. Senate Bill 538 increases the length of time allowed for protective custody of children from 24 to 48 hours, includes Saturday as a day that does not count when scheduling a hearing, and extends the Commission to Review Child Abuse Fatalities for another year. Senate Bill 539 improves access to records, granting in-state law enforcement same access to DCYF files that out-of-state agencies already have and a new process for law enforcement to get medical records in cases involving a crime against a child.

The legislature has also passed Senate Bill 515, which takes additional steps to strengthen the Child Protection Act regarding potential opioid and substance misuse of a parent or guardian, and Governor Hassan will sign it into law when it reaches her desk. The Governor also encouraged the next legislature to pass legislation that improves record retention at DCYF to better track patterns of maltreatment, which she and the commission supported this year but failed to pass the House of Representatives.

"These bipartisan measures are an important step forward to protect our children, increasing timelines to protect vulnerable children longer and facilitating access to court orders and records when time is of the essence in pending investigations and to keep children safe," Governor Hassan said. "I look forward to also signing legislation to strengthen the Child Protection Act regarding substance misuse by parents or guardians, and with the Commission to Review Child Abuse Fatalities being extended for another year, I encourage the legislature to continue focusing on this important issue, including passing a bill to improve record retention at DCYF, because our work to protect our children never ends. I thank Senator Boutin, the commission and children's advocates across New Hampshire for their leadership, and I am proud to sign these bipartisan bills into law to help ensure the safety and well-being of our children."

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