



Rhode Island General Assembly

Office of the House Minority Leader

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Morgan Submits Two Bills to Help Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect

Child/Animal Abuse Cross Reporting System Used Effectively in 13 states

Large number of Deaths/Near Deaths at DCYF Highlight Need for Additional Tools

House Republican Leader Patricia Morgan (Republican House 26: West Warwick, Warwick and Coventry) has submitted two pieces of legislation to aid officials in preventing child abuse. “The recent news concerning the tragic deaths and near-deaths of children in the protection of the Department of Children, Families and Youth has highlighted the need to strengthen our ability to help these very vulnerable children. It is heartbreaking to read the information about their abuse and sometimes, death. We must do better.”

One bill requested by the Office of Child Advocate, which investigates incidents involving failures at DCYF, gives legal authority to the Child Advocate to obtain all pertinent documents of third party caregivers. A loophole in current law prevents the Child Advocate from acquiring the records of adults who are in a household and in close familial relationships with the child, although they are not the parent. “In investigating cases of neglect and abuse, the Child Advocate’s work has been hamstrung by an inability to gain access to records of primary caregivers who interact with the child daily. She asked for the ability to obtain these documents, to prevent future problems and delays.”

In addition, Representative Morgan is once again submitting a bill that was originally requested in 2014. This legislation would mandate that the state adopt a mandatory Child Abuse/Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse Cross-Reporting system. To date, thirteen states, including our neighbors Connecticut and Massachusetts have enacted some version of the law. A strong correlation between child and animal abuse has been established. In fact, a survey of pet owning households found that animals were abused in 88% of the households where child abuse and neglect were present. “We must act this year. Testimony from the Child Advocate identifies 17 deaths of children in DCYF’s protective care. How many other children are living in misery?”



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How many animals are likewise suffering? This cross-reporting system will give officials another tool to identify and prevent further harm.”

The system, which requires animal control officers and social workers at DCYF to collect, report and share information, enjoys widespread support from animal care groups and the previous Chafee administration also expressed a willingness to implement cross-reporting. However, the necessary software would cost an estimated \$500,000. It has not been included in the budget. “Although the state has financial challenges, this expenditure will help to prevent the pain and suffering of vulnerable children and their pets. The costs associated with curing the aftermath of that abuse and neglect far outweigh this expenditure. Once implemented, it will prove its value to our state and the children and animals who need our help.”

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