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# New protocol created for child-abuse cases

October 09, 2011 6:03 PM

[BY HOWARD FISCHER - CAPITOL MEDIA SERVICES](#)

PHOENIX — Conceding there have been several recent “high profile” deaths and near deaths of children, the director of the Department of Economic Security promised Friday to make changes in how complaints are handled.

Clarence Carter told Capitol Media Services that senior staffers have come up with a plan that should cut the average investigation to about 40 days. That, he said, compares with anywhere from 178 to 203 days for typical cases.

A pilot project using the new protocols is set to begin at the end of month. Carter said once the bugs are worked out and the system is implemented statewide, it should free up enough time to be the equivalent of 96 full-time staffers, helping Child Protective Services, part of DES, to investigate more complaints, and more thoroughly.

He said that does not mean CPS workers will be cutting corners, saying that the new protocols will eliminate “redundancy and documentation that doesn't add value.”

Carter, hired to direct DES by Gov. Jan Brewer earlier this year, said meetings with senior staffers showed him the entire process is overly burdensome.

“We just add new policies and regulation on top of old and we tell the worker that all of it's important,” he said. “But the truth is, some of the new (rules) made the old obsolete. And we never took the old away.”

Carter said staffers found 459 reports identified as open investigations where there had been at least three prior reports of child or abuse or neglect in the past 24 months.

He said staffers have evaluated those cases and identified the ones that require immediate attention. Still to be developed, though, is a process for how new reports of child maltreatment with multiple prior “engagements” by CPS will be reviewed.

Carter also promised to improve the “transparency” of Child Protective Services.

But Friday's report contains no mention — and no release of records — of what Chandler police called a “near-death episode” of a baby girl earlier this year due to “injuries (that) were non-

accidental trauma.”

Arizona law requires CPS to make public information in cases of child abuse, abandonment or neglect that resulted in a fatality or near fatality. But the agency has turned down public records requests.

Carter said, though, the doctor who did the evaluation for CPS concluded that despite what is in the police report, her injuries were not life-threatening. The director said that leaves him bound by normal rules of confidentiality.

Dana Naimark, president of the Children's Action Alliance, said she had not seen the report, which was made public after 5 p.m. Friday.

But Naimark, told of some of what was in the report, said it appears to gloss over one key fact: State lawmakers ordered CPS in early 2009 to cut its budget, leaving it up to the agency how to save money. The result was more than 100 caseworkers in training losing their jobs.

Carter, in his report, made no mention of those 2009 layoffs, saying instead that as of the end of last year his agency was authorized to have 1,043 CPS employees.

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