



IN CHICAGO SPORTS

PATIENCE SHOULD PAY OFF FOR WHITE SOX, MONCADA

The slow approach is right for the team's top prospect, writes David Haugh.

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Chicago Tribune



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THURSDAY, MAY 11, 2017

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

TRIBUNE WATCHDOG

3 kids die as DCFS shortens probes

Agency didn't follow up, took shortcuts in fatal abuse cases

By DAVID JACKSON, GARY MARK AND DUAA ELDEIB Chicago Tribune

They found him wrapped in a Superman T-shirt, his burned body so tiny that first responders thought he was 9 months old.

Authorities would later discover that 4-year-old Manuel Aguilar spent the last months of his life in the unheated storage room of a Southwest Side two-flat, naked and scared, pounding on the door to beg for food and water.

He was forced to sleep on the bare floor or in a kitty litter box, his siblings told police. Beaten and starved, he died alone with open eyes.

Then his mother, Alyssa Garcia, her teenage boyfriend and the boyfriend's relative stuffed Manny's 27-pound corpse in a bag of towels and clothes and lit the bundle on fire in the basement of an abandoned house in August 2016, Cook County prosecutors allege.

This wrenching drama of child abuse played out as the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services opened — and in some cases

Turn to DCFS, Page 8



FLATHEAD COUNTY SHERIFF

Madeline Connelly and her dog were missing since May 4.

River Forest native is safe after days in wilderness

By STEVE SCHERING AND ALICIA FABBRE Pioneer Press

When River Forest native Madeline Connelly went missing in rural Montana after a hike last week, her family never lost hope. The family's prayers were answered Wednesday as Connelly, 23, and her dog, Mogi, were found safe.

Connelly's uncle, Michael Connelly, said he received the call Wednesday morning from an emotional Laura Connelly, Madeline's mother, to announce that she had been found.

"Everyone is overjoyed that she's fine," Michael Connelly said in a news conference Wednesday afternoon. "I

Turn to Wilderness, Page 10

Firing, Russia probe fuel more fires in D.C.

White House defends axing Comey; Dems seek special counsel



PHOTO BY ALEXANDER SHCHERBAK / TAAS

In a photo made available by Russia's foreign ministry, Sergey Lavrov, left, President Donald Trump and Sergey Kislyak chat in the Oval Office.

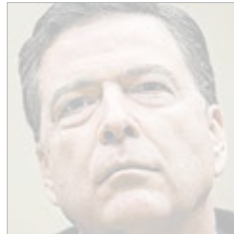
FBI Russia probe could be left adrift; Flynn subpoenaed

By DAVID S. CLOUD AND JOSEPH TANFANI Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The FBI investigation into whether any of President Donald Trump's campaign aides coordinated with Russian intelligence last year appeared on uncertain ground Wednesday as the Justice Department scrambled to find an interim replacement for FBI Director James Comey and the White House fended off accusations that he was fired to cripple the expanding probe.

Democratic senators and congressional aides said Comey was sacked without warning days after he had asked Rod Rosenstein, the deputy attorney general, for more money and personnel for the counter-intelligence investigation into the Russian meddling, an apparent sign that the 9-month-old inquiry was gaining traction.

Turn to Russia, Page 12



WIN MCNAMEE/GETTY

Former FBI Director James Comey was fired by President Trump on Tuesday.

INSIDE

By firing Comey, President Trump may have fanned the flames he hoped to control. **Analysis, Page 12**

Amid controversial dismissal, Trump meets with Russian foreign minister in the Oval Office. **Page 12**

Illinois Democrats want independent probe following Comey ouster; Republicans want answers. **Page 13**

How it happened: Fierce backlash surprises Trump

By MICHAEL A. MEMOLI AND LISA MASCARO Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The White House sought to portray President Donald Trump's firing of FBI Director James Comey as an act of decisiveness Wednesday, as administration allies fought back against calls for a special counsel to oversee the investigation into Russian meddling in last year's election.

Although the ouster took the White House staff by surprise, officials who described the timeline of events said it marked the culmination of a long-running erosion of confidence between the FBI chief and the president.

"He wasn't doing a good job. Very simply," Trump said in the Oval Office, where he met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Ambassador Sergey Kislyak.

Officials acknowledged, however, that

Turn to Comey, Page 13



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Chicago Tribune

Thursday, May 11, 2017



CHRIS SWEDA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTO

Rachel Fournier, upper left, grandmother of Manuel “Manny” Aguilar, joins with community members in releasing balloons Sept. 7, 2016, in remembrance of the 4-year-old boy.

TRIBUNE WATCHDOG

3 kids die as DCFS shortens probes

Agency didn't follow up, took shortcuts in fatal abuse cases

BY DAVID JACKSON, GARY MARX AND DUAA ELDEIB

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Then his mother, Alyssa Garcia, her teenage boyfriend and the boyfriend's relative stuffed Manny's 27-pound corpse in a bag of towels and clothes and lit the bundle on fire in the basement of an abandoned house in August 2016, Cook County prosecutors allege.

This wrenching drama of child abuse played out as the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services opened — and in some cases quickly closed — mul-

tiple investigations into outcries that Manny and his siblings were beaten and living in dangerous squalor.

Manny's DCFS files are riddled with shortcuts and failures, a Tribune investigation has found.

DCFS did not interview or even acknowledge the presence in the home of Garcia's violent, gang-involved boyfriend. When Garcia promised to take Manny to the doctor, DCFS did not follow up to learn that she didn't. In the years before Manny's homicide, his siblings told an agency caseworker about Garcia's violent abuse, but DCFS did not investigate their allegations.

The lapses in Manny's cases were not unique. A Tribune investigation of two other Cook County child fatalities since November 2015 found incomplete inquiries and nonexistent follow-ups as DCFS closed probes in the homes shortly before youths were beaten or starved to death. Investigators did not interview key witnesses, the Tribune found. They missed obvious signs of abuse and failed to gather medical reports and other evidence.

The Tribune investigation also found that after these three deaths occurred, DCFS pushed to close Cook County cases even faster, offering financial incentives to investigators who completed probes within 14 days. And the Tribune also found that, last year, investigators confirmed fewer cases for neglect or abuse compared with the previous year.

The Tribune findings come two years after Gov. Bruce Rauner appointed former Florida child welfare director George Sheldon to overhaul an Illinois agency beset with scandals, child deaths and charges of mismanagement.

Last week the Tribune reported that Sheldon is considering a job offer from a Miami nonprofit as he faces Illinois ethics probes into DCFS contracts that benefited his Florida friends and political associates.

With a potential exit looming, the reformer who inherited one mess may leave another.

Closing cases faster

DCFS was rattled last month by another fatality case when 17-month-old Semaj Crosby was found dead in her Joliet Township home in the midst of two DCFS investigations. Sheldon told state lawmakers he ordered a Quality Assurance Review of Semaj's case.

"If mistakes were made, we'll correct them," he told the Tribune. "I don't think you can slough off a child's death. It's too important."

Of the three child deaths examined by the Tribune, Sheldon said he did not know enough of the details to discuss them. Still, when DCFS closes an abuse or neglect investigation shortly before a child is killed, "then the system has failed in that case," he told the newspaper.

The Tribune investigation found that in the fall of 2016, Sheldon pushed investigators to speed up abuse and neglect investigations in Cook County, according to internal agency documents and interviews.

Sheldon said his goal is to focus workers on the most serious allegations and free them from spurious cases that can be easily dismissed.

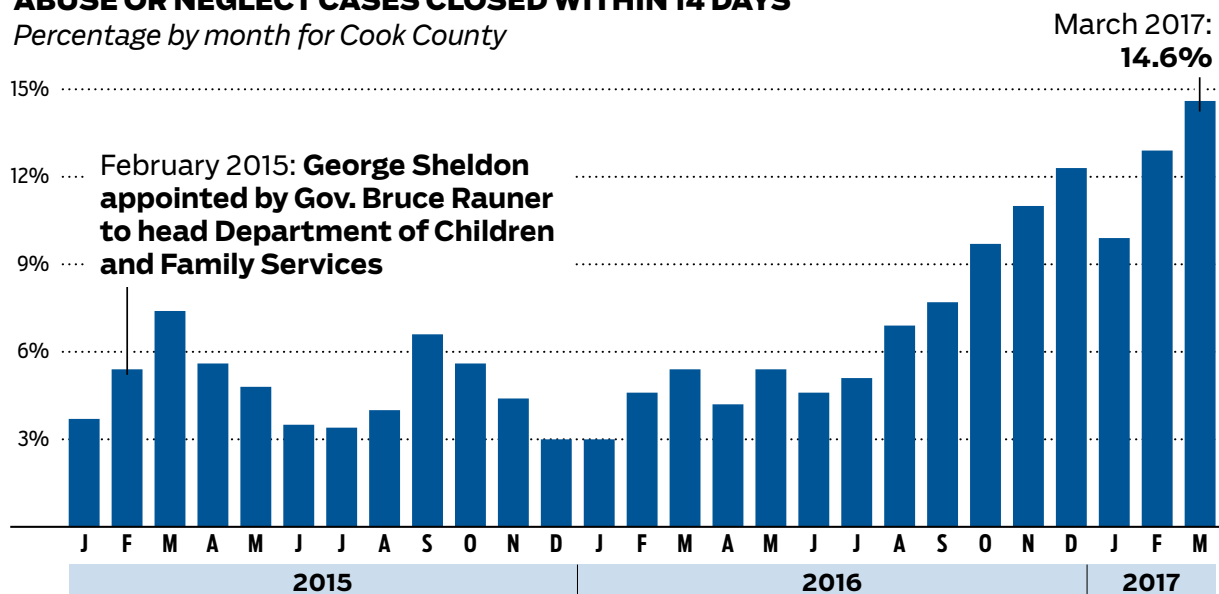
Some DCFS frontline investigators in Cook County tell the Tribune they now face unrealistic deadlines and new pressure to close cases even when young people



Manny Aguilar died in a storage room, naked and begging for food and water.

ABUSE OR NEGLECT CASES CLOSED WITHIN 14 DAYS

Percentage by month for Cook County



SOURCE: Tribune analysis of Illinois Department of Children and Family Services data

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

are left in harm's way.

Those workers spoke on condition they not be identified because they are not authorized to speak about agency policy and some feared workplace retribution.

State law gives DCFS 60 days to complete investigations unless supervisors grant extensions because medical and police reports or other critical information is pending.

Starting last fall, under a new DCFS initiative called "Blue Star," DCFS tripled the percentage of Cook County abuse and neglect investigations closed within 14 days. The closure rate rose from about 5 percent per month to 15 percent by March 2017, a Tribune analysis of countywide agency data found.

Agency goals call for that percentage to double again for at least some Cook County teams: 30 percent of investigations should be closed in less than 14 days by March 2018, according to internal agency memos examined by the Tribune.

The same goals were given to DCFS' Chicago Child Advocacy Center teams, which handle time-consuming child sex abuse allegations and serious injury cases.

One of those teams in March 2017 closed 2.4 percent of its cases in 14 days. That team also is expected to close 30 percent of its cases within two weeks by March 2018, a 12-fold increase, internal agency memos show.

Several DCFS employees told the Tribune that supervisors offered overtime pay, as opposed to comp time, to child protection investigators who met agency goals for closing cases in 14 days. Those employees and other government officials said they are concerned by what they view as a financial incentive that could skew workers' handling of investigations.

"I can see why people are up in arms if they feel they are being paid to close cases more quickly. Anything less than a thorough investigation is abhorrent," said Cook County Public Guardian Robert Harris, whose office represents abused and neglected children in juvenile court.

DCFS Cook County Regional Administrator Jacquetta Colyer, who oversees the Blue Star initiative, denied that the agency offered any reward to child protection investigators who quickly closed cases.

But DCFS Senior Deputy Director for Strategy and Performance Neil Skene said that in light of questions from the Tribune, DCFS will review how the Blue Star program was communicated to workers and whether the case-closing goals are appropriate.

Sheldon said he supported the goals of the Blue Star program but was concerned

by the Tribune's reports of complaints from investigators.

"No employee should feel pressured to inappropriately close an investigation if they don't have full information," Sheldon said. "Closing an investigation should never happen until an investigation is complete."

'A toxic work environment'

As cases were closed more rapidly last year, DCFS saw a drop in the percentage of investigations in which abuse and neglect allegations were confirmed, according to a Tribune analysis of agency data since 2015.

In Cook County, DCFS "indicated" 26 percent of their abuse and neglect allegations reported to the agency in 2015 — meaning investigators found credible evidence of harm to children in these instances. Last year the "indicated" rate dropped to 20 percent, according to the agency data.

Sheldon called the drop in indicated cases a vacillation in the data and not a result of agency policy to close cases more rapidly.

"You're going to see fluctuations like that," he said.

Sheldon also disputed a January 2017 report from DCFS Inspector General Denise Kane that some investigators are handling perilously high caseloads, which Kane wrote is creating "a toxic work environment in which it is foreseeable that some investigators will take dangerous shortcuts that can lead to lethal errors."

Following two of the child deaths examined by the Tribune, DCFS management offered the investigators trauma counseling, but the investigators declined because of their heavy workloads, records and interviews show.

Sheldon said he has hired new child protection staff and last year temporarily re-assigned scores of workers to close out unresolved cases, actions that should reduce investigators' caseloads.

According to state records, 75 children died within a year of DCFS closing an abuse or neglect investigation in 2014 and 2015. It is unclear how many of those children died from abuse.

The Tribune focused on three deaths by mistreatment that occurred under Sheldon's leadership, with each case highlighting the challenges his child protection workers face and the tragic errors they can make.

Top DCFS officials provided limited information about the three child fatality cases. The newspaper based its account on police reports, court records, child welfare files and interviews with family members, witnesses and government officials.

At 6 months old, dead of starvation

DCFS opened an investigation into the home of infant Jazmine Walker in March 2016 after the girl's father left Jazmine and her two brothers unattended as the 1- and 3-year-old boys wandered around their Edgewater apartment building.

Jerome Walker was charged with three misdemeanor counts of child endangerment, then 10 days later was arrested and subsequently imprisoned on separate drug and weapons charges, records show.

Walker had parted ways with the children's mother after an argument, and she was homeless, according to DCFS records.

DCFS placed Jazmine and her siblings with Jerome Walker's mother, Mattie Davis, under a "safety plan" that made no mention of their mother, according to DCFS records examined by the Tribune.

But within days the children were back with their mother, Chequita Bell. The family moved to Kokomo, Ind., to stay with a relative and also spent a brief time in south suburban Harvey, records and interviews show.



ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTO

The burned body of Manuel “Manny” Aguilar, 4, was found in the basement of an abandoned house in August 2016.

On May 17, 2016, a DCFS investigator closed his file after reporting that he had visited Jazmine and her siblings at their grandmother Davis’ apartment in Chicago’s Edgewater neighborhood.

“Jazmine was asleep in her bassinet on her back,” the investigator’s report said. “All three of the children appeared to be free of any salient signs of abuse or neglect.”

Eight days later, Jazmine was dead of starvation in the Harvey home where her mother most recently kept her.

The 6-month-old’s dehydrated corpse weighed less than 5 pounds. Jazmine’s bones protruded visibly beneath her skin, and her head was larger than the rest of her body, according to Harvey police records and a Cook County forensic pathology report.

A doctor would also describe the two brothers as “showing a sign of wasting.” They were hospitalized to be evaluated for a refeeding program, according to Harvey police records.

Davis told the Tribune the DCFS investigator never examined Jazmine and her brothers in May in her Edgewater apartment.

“He did not come to my home. I’m 100 percent certain. The kids never came back to my place when they left for Kokomo,” Davis said. “He never saw them.”

Jazmine’s paternal aunt Dorothy Williams also said that DCFS could not have seen the children at Davis’ apartment in May. Bell and the youths stayed temporarily at her home in Kokomo before going to Harvey the night before Jazmine’s death, she said.

“He messed up. That’s what he did,” Williams said of the DCFS investigator. “I think this could have been prevented.”

DCFS Senior Deputy Director for Operations Michael Ruppe said he was unaware of the family’s account that the investigator never saw the three children in May. After the Tribune raised questions about the case, DCFS immediately referred the matter to Inspector General Kane, who is conducting an investigation. Kane declined to comment.

Skene cautioned that the investigator’s case notes on that date “would be a lot to

have manufactured.” But Skene also said: “We have no toleration for fabrication of notes and are taking your information very seriously.”

DCFS workers have been found to make false claims in reports in the past. Between 2012 and 2016, DCFS determined that 29 child protection workers falsified records or statements in abuse or neglect probes, a Tribune analysis found. Those workers falsely claimed to have met with school, medical and law enforcement officials, families and even children, DCFS alleged. The agency recommended firing 16 of those workers, but the disciplinary outcomes could not immediately be determined.

Still, Ruppe said more could have been done to protect Jazmine and the brothers. “Those children should have been observed carefully.”

DCFS said it has taken steps to correct or prevent lapses in investigators’ protocol. DCFS recently rolled out a mobile app that stamps the date, time and GPS location on photographs of children to confirm the investigator was actually present. And the agency has issued new directives requiring investigators to examine infants and children while they are awake and, if needed, “disrobe the child,” Ruppe said.

The Tribune identified other investigative failures in Jazmine’s DCFS file. Among the examples: Jazmine, who was born premature and suffered from spina bifida, had missed numerous medical appointments and was behind on immunizations and basic medical checks.

The DCFS investigator reported that Jazmine’s family was taking her to a doctor. But case records show no evidence that he followed up, in which case he would have learned the doctor visit never took place.

DCFS has tightened requirements that caseworkers follow up after asking a parent or guardian to take a child to the doctor, Ruppe said.

The DCFS investigator, who has not been disciplined following Jazmine’s death, was paid \$170,000 including overtime last year, and \$56,000 in the first four months of 2017, state records show.

Currently held in Cook County Jail, Bell has pleaded not guilty to murder and other charges.

‘They didn’t check’ on baby

The beating death of 2-year-old Elliana Claiborne in November 2015 marked the end of DCFS’ sporadic investigation into her suffering.

Elliana came to the agency’s attention a year before, when her mother, Jazmine Jones, allegedly got drunk and angry at a party in Calumet City and dropped the girl 6 feet down over a balcony railing into a snowbank.

A 16-year-old runaway, Jones had already been detained by police two dozen times for robbery, drug possession, aggravated battery and other crimes, records and interviews show.

“Elliana had abrasions to her face, neck and chest,” according to a DCFS report on the Calumet City incident. “The baby has red marks and bruising and was not wearing any pants.”

Jones was briefly detained, but charges were dismissed in Cook County juvenile court. DCFS gave Elliana to Jones’ mother, Tomika Tucker, even though Jones told agency investigators that Tucker’s home was not safe because of drug activity, according to a DCFS report.

Tucker acknowledged to the Tribune that a relative in the home was a recovering heroin addict on methadone but said Jones was “trying to bad-mouth the home to keep the baby.” After DCFS gave Tucker the baby, the agency dropped out of sight, according to Tucker’s account and government records.

The investigator had referred the family to a private contractor for counseling

and other services, but the contractor never got the handoff and did not open a case, DCFS reports show.

“They never came out. They didn’t check on the baby. They didn’t check on my status,” Tucker told the Tribune. “Nobody heard anything from DCFS from the last time I signed that guardianship until Elliana’s death.”

Tucker eventually gave Elliana back to Jones, who moved into a South Side home with a boyfriend and others, the Tribune found. There in November 2015, prosecutors allege, Jones punched her daughter several times in the abdomen for refusing to eat noodles and went out to buy marijuana. Within hours the baby took her last breath. Elliana’s autopsy showed scars or bruises on her head, abdomen, face and back, burns on her foot and two rib fractures.

DCFS acknowledged that the case fell through the cracks because of poor communication between DCFS investigators and the contract agency.

“You should ensure the case is handed off,” Ruppe said.

DCFS managers in at least one critical instance also oversaw the case via email as opposed to face-to-face meetings or phone calls with the investigator.

“Supervision should not be occurring by email,” Ruppe said.

Jones, who has pleaded not guilty to murder and other charges, gave birth to another daughter in July while locked up at Cook County Jail. This time DCFS took the newborn.

Left in danger

Manny Aguilar was born into a house of fear and lacerating pain.

His mother, Alyssa Garcia, would eventually have six children by three current or former gang members, and Garcia and the children told caseworkers that two of the men used drugs and beat Garcia in the home, government reports and interviews show.

The first time DCFS investigated the family was in 2012, when Manny was nearly 3 months old. DCFS took him and three older siblings from Garcia after she left Manny unclothed and unfed with a stranger and then locked the 2-, 4- and 5-year-old children alone in a car through the freezing night.

Child welfare records alleged she went to smoke dope and sleep with a gang-involved boyfriend in his apartment.

Garcia pleaded guilty to misdemeanor charges of endangering the life of a child and was put on court supervision. DCFS took custody of the children, and Garcia completed court-mandated parenting classes and some therapy.

The DCFS investigation indicated Garcia only for neglect — not abuse — even though Garcia’s children said she beat them with a belt and sandals, punched them in the abdomen and nose, and left them bruised. Garcia would smoke marijuana when she drove them places in the car and also would “sniff crack,” the children told DCFS.

Two years later, DCFS opened its second investigation into the family. Garcia was getting overnight visits in 2014 with the children while they lived in a foster home when one of the boys returned from an overnight with a bruise on his leg. A DCFS caseworker concluded that the boy fell off his bunk bed but nonetheless advised Garcia to stop using corporal punishment; the investigation was closed as “unfounded.”

By November 2015, DCFS had returned the children to Garcia. Then, in January 2016, DCFS opened its third investigation after the two eldest boys texted a former foster parent saying Garcia “beat the crap” out of them, records show. They said they were frightened and wanted to be taken out of her home.

That probe was closed and “unfounded” in 3 1/2 weeks despite notable gaps in



CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT PHOTOS

Manny's mother, Alyssa Garcia, and Christian Camarena await trial on multiple charges. They pleaded not guilty.

the file, the Tribune found.

For example, the DCFS investigator never obtained the children's cellphone to verify and analyze the text messages. After the boys made their outcry, Garcia confiscated the phone. The agency worker should have investigated why Garcia took that phone, DCFS officials now say. "It would be seen as a red flag," Ruppe told the Tribune. "It should have been further delved into."

The investigator also never noted that Garcia, then 26, was living with — and pregnant by — a 17-year-old with 22 juvenile arrests for crimes including aggravated battery to a police officer, drug charges and car theft, records show. The 17-year-old was often taking care of the kids by himself, Tribune interviews show.

In addition, Manny's doctor told the DCFS investigator that Manny looked sick when he last saw the boy in November and said Manny should be brought in for an appointment — but the investigator never followed up to learn that the appointment did not happen.

Garcia's eldest child told DCFS in 2012 that Garcia coached him on what to say to minimize her role in the child endangerment case. Yet a DCFS investigator in 2016 interviewed 4-year-old Manny in the home with Garcia present, according to Tribune interviews and DCFS records. Manny told the investigator his mother was treating him well.

After Manny's death, his older brothers told a relative that Garcia promised to feed Manny and give him water if he lied to the investigator, Tribune interviews show.

DCFS closed that third investigation in February 2016. With child protection investigators out of the picture, the final six months of Manny's life were unspeakable.

In the storage room where a dog had been kept until it died of hypothermia, Manny was beaten with a belt or hanger by Garcia and her boyfriend, according to one judge's court order.

In one instance, when Garcia was watching TV on the couch while Manny pounded on the door for water, an older brother asked if he could let Manny out. Garcia said to ignore him, records and interviews show.

And when the storage room finally went quiet, Garcia sent in her 10-year-old son to find Manny dead.

Garcia and her boyfriend tried to obscure the homicide by erasing the boy's identity. They allegedly knocked out Manny's teeth with a baseball bat, DCFS reports show.

Garcia, her boyfriend and the boyfriend's relative Christian Camarena were arrested four days after Manny's death as they ran out of the abandoned building

where they allegedly lit fire to Manny's shrouded corpse.

Garcia and Camarena currently await trial on charges of attempted arson and concealment of a death. They have both pleaded not guilty.

The boyfriend, who is now 18, was found delinquent in juvenile court of attempted arson and concealment of a death and is currently being held in a juvenile detention center. He was being manipulated by Garcia and "not all of these (abuse) allegations are applicable to him," his attorney Frank Avila told the Tribune.

Robbin Carroll, who runs a neighborhood center and a summer school attended by Manny's older siblings, said Manny's death left an open wound from which the community has yet to heal.

"DCFS left these kids all in danger," Carroll said. "In the time they needed them most, DCFS was not there."

Chicago Tribune



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MONDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2017

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

Fee won't level the field for cabbies

Taxis still costlier despite proposed 15 cents on Uber rides

By JOHN BYRNE
Chicago Tribune

While Uber and Lyft passengers would see a bump in city taxes under Mayor Rahm Emanuel's budget plan, they still would have to fork over less for rides than people taking cabs.

Emanuel last week asked the City Council to increase the fees tacked on to ride-share trips by 15 cents — to 67 cents — for a neighborhood pickup starting in 2018. The fees would go up an additional 5 cents — to 72 cents — in 2019 under the blueprint the mayor delivered to aldermen.

Putting side by side the taxes and fees assessed on the cab and ride-share industries is something of an apples-to-oranges comparison. In recent years, the City Council largely has tacked new fees onto Uber and Lyft on a per-ride basis, based on the companies' records of the number of rides hailed via online apps.

The city makes money on cabs in part by taxing the taxi medallions that allow vehicles to legally pick up passengers. City Hall puts the medallions up for sale and charges owners to renew them. The city also collects monthly ground transportation taxes of \$98 per cab and an additional \$22 per month to improve cab wheelchair accessibility.

Depending on how early in a cabbie's shift you get into the back seat, a portion of the flag pull could be going into city coffers. According to city statute, 45 cents of each of the first 10 fares of the day go toward workers' compensation insurance that cab companies are required to carry. From a cabdriver's first five fares, 40 cents goes toward the monthly ground transportation tax, while 10 cents goes toward the wheelchair accessibility fund.

Emanuel's latest round of proposed ride-share fee increases comes after cabbies and their supporters have spent years loudly complaining they can't compete because they face much more expensive regulations. Even if the mayor's new 15-cent fee gets added to Uber and Lyft fares for 2018,

Turn to **Fee**, Page 7



JOSE M. OSORIO/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Bears safety Eddie Jackson runs back an interception 76 yards for a touchdown Sunday at Soldier Field.

Bears repeating

Second win in a row, aggressive defense offer hope for fans

In front of Panthers coach and former Bears linebacker Ron Rivera, the defense dominated in 1985 Bears fashion, converting three turnovers into 14 points and carrying an offense merely along for the ride. The Panthers possessed the ball for 38 min-



**BEARS 17
PANTHERS 3**

utes, 35 seconds, but the Bears controlled both lines of scrimmage in a game old-fashioned enough to show highlights in black-and-white. Suddenly, finally, what's happening at Halas Hall approaches respectability. **David Haugh in Chicago Sports**

Older motorcyclists more likely to die

Experts say retirees come back to riding without the same skills



MARY WISNIEWSKI
Getting Around

When Ron Havens takes a road trip on his Honda Gold Wing motorcycle, he sees a lot of riders like himself — guys over 60 who rode when they were young and are back at it now that they're retired.

And some are not as skilled as they imagine.

"The people our age think we're really good riders and we don't take (safety) courses," said Havens, 73, of Springfield. "And the bikes are bigger now than what I rode in the '70s — bigger, faster, with more acceleration."

National statistics on motorcycle fatalities show a curious trend: Whereas in 1975, 80 percent of motorcycle fatalities involved riders 29 years old or younger, now the age group with the most fatalities is 50 and older, at 35 percent, according to the Insurance Institute for



ABEL URIBE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Robert Erickson, second from left, 58, takes part in IDOT's Cycle Rider Safety Training Program on Saturday.

Highway Safety, a nonprofit highway safety research group funded by auto insurance companies. Ninety-one percent of

those killed in 2015 were male.

The total number of motorcycle fatalities also has been rising — it ac-

counted for 14 percent of all deaths on U.S. roads in 2016, with 5,286 fatalities, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration or NHTSA. This was 5 percent higher than 2015 and more than double the number from 20 years ago.

Why is the death toll growing among older people? There are a couple of possible reasons, according to transportation and safety experts.

One reason is that they're a big part of the population — there were 76 million U.S. residents born between 1946 and 1964, and they are going to

Turn to **Riders**, Page 8

DCFS control in files minimal

15 kids dead after cases outsourced to nonprofit agencies

By DAVID JACKSON
AND GARY MARX
Chicago Tribune

The 5-year-old girl was found dead in the bathtub with shallow water framing her cherubic face and open eyes.

The state Department of Children and Family Services had conducted two abuse investigations into Verna Tobicoe's Southeast Side home in the months before her death in May 2015. The agency had also hired a nonprofit group to make frequent visits and conduct safety checks on Verna and two siblings.

Even as Verna was hospitalized with a broken arm and her older brother repeatedly appeared at hospital emergency rooms or doctors' offices with suspicious lacerations and bruises, a caseworker for the nonprofit organization filed cheerful reports saying the kids were safe.

And then 44-pound Verna became part of a growing pattern of similar fatalities: She was one of 15 Illinois children to die of abuse or neglect from 2012 through last year in homes receiving "intact family services" from organizations hired by DCFS, a Tribune investigation found.

There was only one such child death under the intact family services program during the previous five years from 2007 through

Turn to **DCFS**, Page 4

Trump: Before feast, a tax bill

President says he'd like to see overhaul by Thanksgiving

By SARAH D. WIRE
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump raised expectations Sunday about Republicans' timetable for completing tax reform, indicating he expects the as-of-yet unwritten overhaul of the tax code on his desk by Thanksgiving.

"I want to get it by the end of the year but I'd be very disappointed if it took that long," he said on Fox's "Sunday Morning Futures with Maria Bartiromo." He said lawmakers should forgo their Thanksgiving break if they can't send him a measure by then.

Republican leaders have painted an optimistic picture of the overhaul's chances, saying they hope to have it done by the end of the year. But many have predicted a vote could roll over into 2018, particularly with Trump's addition of several issues to their agenda.

That includes a legislative fix for the legal status of immigrants brought to the country illegally as children, reaching a bipartisan agreement to stabilize health

Turn to **Taxes**, Page 12



TV's best holiday? Halloween

You might assume the best holiday TV is Christmas TV — you've been told this for years. But you've been told wrong. **Christopher Borrelli in A+E**

Catalonia defiant in face of threats

The independence furor in Spain has sent shock waves across Europe, with some fearing it could galvanize separatist sentiment elsewhere. **Nation & World, Page 11**



Tom Skilling's forecast High 64 Low 45

Chicago Weather Center: Complete forecast on back page of A+E section

\$1.99 city and suburbs, \$2.50 elsewhere 170th year No. 296 © Chicago Tribune



Chicago Tribune

Monday, October 23, 2017



NANCY STONE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTO

Beverly "B.J." Walker took the helm of the Department of Children and Family Services in June. She is its 10th director or acting director since 2011.

DCFS control in files minimal

15 kids dead after cases outsourced to nonprofit agencies

BY DAVID JACKSON AND GARY MARX

The 5-year-old girl was found dead in the bathtub with shallow water framing her cherubic face and open eyes.

The state Department of Children and Family Services had conducted two abuse investigations into Verna Tobicoe's Southeast Side home in the months before her death in May 2015. The agency had also hired a nonprofit group to make frequent visits and conduct safety checks on Verna and two siblings.

Even as Verna was hospitalized with a broken arm and her older brother repeatedly appeared at hospital emergency rooms or doctors' offices with suspicious lacerations and bruises, a caseworker for the nonprofit organization filed cheerful reports saying the kids were safe.

And then 44-pound Verna became part of a growing pattern of similar fatalities: She was one of 15 Illinois children to die of abuse or neglect from 2012 through last year in homes receiving "intact family services" from organizations hired by DCFS, a Tribune investigation found.

There was only one such child death under the intact family services program during the previous five years from 2007 through 2011, according to DCFS records released to the Tribune under the Freedom of Information Act.

The mission of intact family services, which roughly 2,700 children are receiving statewide, is to offer counseling, resources and oversight to keep families together instead of putting children through another trauma by removing them from their home and placing them with strangers.

The spike in deaths began in 2012 after DCFS completely privatized the program, putting the care of families in the hands of nonprofit groups but doing little to evaluate the quality of their work, give them guidance and resources, or hold them accountable when children were hurt or put at risk, the Tribune found.

The girlfriend of Verna's father is now awaiting trial on first-degree murder charges in the girl's death. Authorities found lacerations in Verna's liver and intestines as well as a skull fracture and bruises across her body from repeated blows. Lisamarie Villasana, 29, has pleaded not guilty and told police that Verna hit her head after slipping on spilled Gatorade.

The agency was rattled by a similar death in April, when 17-month-old Semaj Crosby was found dead in her Joliet Township home after DCFS had conducted more than 10 abuse investigations into the family and used the intact family services program to send a caseworker for periodic visits.

Illinois' new child welfare director, Beverly "B.J." Walker, said she was alarmed by the Tribune's finding on the surge of child fatalities in intact family services cases as well as by a sharply critical report from the DCFS inspector general on Verna's death.

Walker recently asked her staff to provide reports on the abuse or neglect of any child in the intact family services program and said she was shocked to discover that at least 10 percent of children were reportedly mistreated while receiving those services. "That's very high. ... I can tell you this, it happens too much," Walker told the Tribune.

The inspector general's report, which has not been made public but was examined by the Tribune, determined that DCFS conducted cursory and ineffective investigations into a series of abuse allegations in the months before Verna's death. DCFS also inexplicably failed to evaluate whether Villasana, the father's girlfriend, needed therapy or assistance — even though she was serving as the children's primary caretaker. And DCFS did not consider her a possible perpetrator when children were hurt, although she often was the only adult in the home.

Kathy Grzelak, the new chief of Kaleidoscope 4 Kids, the group that served Verna's family, keeps a laminated prayer card from the girl's funeral pinned to her office bulletin board — a reminder of her organization's painful failures.

The wake was crowded with family, Grzelak recalled, and the girl in the tiny open casket was dressed in a glittering blue dress to resemble the fearless princess Elsa from her favorite movie, "Frozen." Grzelak said only faint traces of Verna's bruises could be seen through the mortician's makeup.

Injury after injury

The story of Verna's short life is told in confidential child welfare case files, the DCFS inspector general's report, separate police and court records, and interviews with several of her relatives.

Following two separate investigations into squalor and neglect of their home — one unfounded and the other confirmed — Verna's parents split up, and DCFS placed the children with their father, Villasana and the couple's new baby in 2014. In August of that year, DCFS referred the children to Kaleidoscope for intact family

services. At the time, Verna was 4 years old, her brother was 6 and her sister was 9.

The state agency directed Kaleidoscope to ensure the children got proper medical care; help their father access Medicaid, food stamps and government cash assistance; refer him to parenting classes and other programs; and also to help the children's biological mother — even though she had only minimal contact with the children after they left her home.

Kaleidoscope did a lot for the children. The caseworker brought them winter coats, provided a \$70 gift card to buy treatments for their head lice and tapped state funds for \$1,350 when their father fell behind on his rent, records show. When Verna's older sister was not allowed to attend school because her immunizations were out of date, Kaleidoscope took her to the doctor.

But one crucial omission threatened to doom the arrangement from the start: DCFS failed to include Villasana in its service plan. She was the children's primary caretaker while their father worked night shifts at a local pharmacy and some days on construction sites, according to the inspector general's report and interviews with officials and relatives. But Villasana was never put on the Kaleidoscope caseworker's radar, according to those records and interviews.

"My plan was not even constructed to serve her. There was no information leading up to Lisa being the caretaker," the former Kaleidoscope caseworker, Stephanie Lynell Ivey, told the Tribune in an interview. She subsequently left the agency and now works as a special education classroom assistant.

Suspicious injuries to the children began almost immediately, records show. That August, Verna was taken to a hospital with a broken arm — a "spiral fracture" that often indicates abuse by twisting.

DCFS opened an abuse investigation after being notified by the hospital. But even though Villasana was the only caretaker in the home at the time, she was not investigated as a potential perpetrator. Instead, the DCFS investigation focused on the father. And because he was at work when Verna was injured, DCFS termed the abuse allegation "unfounded" and closed the case.

State officials also did not tell Kaleidoscope about the hotline call regarding Verna's broken arm. Ivey did subsequently file a note saying Verna was wearing a cast, but she accepted Villasana's explanation that Verna had fallen.

Ivey told the Tribune she was operating under the assumption that DCFS had evaluated the home where the children were placed and that it was safe.

Then, starting in October 2014, educators, relatives and medical professionals began notifying DCFS of a series of injuries to Verna's brother, along with their suspicions the children were being mistreated.

Kindergarten teacher April Palacios called the DCFS hotline that month to report that Verna's brother "came to school today with bruising all over his arm that looked like a hand print," DCFS records show. She emailed photographs of the injuries to DCFS and also reported a separate laceration on the boy's face.

Children and adults in the home gave sharply divergent accounts of how the boy was bruised, with some saying he fell while climbing a closet door frame like Spider-



FAMILY PHOTO

Five-year-old Verna Tobicoe was found dead in a bathtub in May 2015. She had suffered a skull fracture and internal injuries

Man and others that he tripped over his sister's princess slipper and hit a dresser drawer, according to DCFS and police records.

Palacios felt her concerns were never taken seriously, she told the Tribune. "It was so unfair," she said. "This was preventable."

Ivey, of Kaleidoscope, did take the boy to a doctor after Palacios reported the bruise on his arm and a cut on his face to DCFS, but the caseworker did not tell the doctor about Palacios' hotline call, and the doctor was unaware of any suspicions of abuse, records show.

Over the next several weeks, the boy's father notified Ivey several times that the boy had new head gashes or bruises after slips and falls around the house. But her checkups typically came days later, after the injuries had faded.

As she wrote in one brief report: "Upon seeing the children there were no signs of abuse or neglect. All the children appeared to be happy and healthy."

Ivey says today: "There was no sign of any physical abuse. I never observed it or witnessed it."

DCFS did open an investigation, but it was cursory — and again targeted the father and not the main caretaker, Villasana. The DCFS investigators interviewed all three siblings, their father and Villasana in less than an hour at the family home, one case note shows.

In finding allegations of abuse against the father to be unfounded, the DCFS supervisor wrote: "Minor denied he was injured by his father. Father reported that he was at work at the time of the injury."

Because DCFS and Kaleidoscope never recognized Villasana as the primary caretaker, they never learned that Villasana felt overwhelmed by her new child care responsibilities, according to subsequent DCFS reports and interviews with her relatives.

Before Verna and her siblings arrived, Villasana had been caring only for her own newborn. Now she had three additional youngsters who were extraordinarily demanding. Two showed signs of learning and developmental disabilities, records show, and all had been raised until then in a chaotic home with little adult supervision.

Just days before Verna's death, Villasana temporarily left the home because of the stress, according to a police report and relatives. She also had attempted suicide in recent months by taking pills and drinking bleach.

"It was just too much for one person to take care of those four kids," said Villasana's stepfather, Juan Bautista.

Checking a box

DCFS officials completely privatized the intact family program in 2012 amid a deep financial crisis as well as persistent government management problems — families were getting services for three or four years without seeing any real improvement, for example.

But as the state agency's role shifted from providing direct services to overseeing and managing nonprofit contractors, DCFS simply failed at its new task, agency director Walker told the Tribune.



COOK COUNTY SHERIFF PHOTO
Lisamarie Villasana, the girlfriend of Verna Tobicoe's father, is awaiting trial on first-degree murder charges.



NANCY STONE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTO

Verna Tobicoe was one of 15 Illinois children to die of abuse or neglect from 2012 through 2016 in homes with DCFS' "intact family services."

“When we did that privatization, we ... more or less just sent cases over and we didn’t have any expectations — or any good expectations — about what (the non-profits) were going to do,” said Walker, who took the helm of DCFS in June as its 10th director or acting director since 2011.

DCFS does send monitors to the nonprofits’ offices four times a year — but Grzelak, of Kaleidoscope, said they only look at paperwork to make sure files are complete and rarely try to gauge the quality or impact of the agency’s work.

“We can check a box and say, ‘We did our three home visits.’ But what did we do in that visit? What did we accomplish?” Grzelak said.

Kaleidoscope also never learns what the DCFS monitors find in those inspections, Grzelak said. “There is nothing in writing. There is no accountability. When are we going to get a more robust conversation about how we are doing?” she said. “There should be no secretiveness.”

Walker said she has begun reforming the program by hiring more child protective staff and increasing DCFS’ oversight and supervision of the nonprofits. “We are laser beam-focused. We’re following up to make sure that our actions are leading to improvements.”

She also said she is looking for additional financial resources for the intact family services program. The rate paid to agencies such as Kaleidoscope has not increased for at least five years, according to providers. Last year, Grzelak said, Kaleidoscope had to supplement the \$730,000 it received from DCFS with \$98,000 from other sources to cover basic costs related to intact family services.

Caseworkers, meanwhile, are often poorly trained, underpaid and burdened with overwhelming caseloads.

“We have young workers who are not adequately trained, who are surviving and doing what is in front of them every day,” Grzelak said.

The job can be “scary, heartbreaking and stressful,” Ivey said.

Assigned to assist both of Verna’s biological parents, Ivey was carrying 17 other cases at the time, nearly double the average of 10 recommended in the DCFS con-

tract, according to Grzelak and Ivey.

The DCFS inspector general determined that Ivey did not seem to understand the family or know how to counsel and assist them. Ivey disputed that.

“My role was to stabilize the family and make sure they had their basic needs met, and that’s what I did. Sometimes I would visit that home twice a week. I even gave them some of my own daughter’s hand-me-downs,” Ivey told the Tribune. “Intact is a short-term fix, and in that short time all you’re praying for as a worker is that nobody dies while this baby is on your watch.”

DCFS generally expects the nonprofits to close intact family services cases within six months, and the agency’s contracts start to reduce payments at that point, even though Grzelak and other providers say families often still need help.

In the sixth month of Verna’s case, in January 2015, Kaleidoscope closed its file. “There are no concerns regarding the safety and well-being of the children,” a Kaleidoscope supervisor wrote.

Four months later, Verna was found in the bathtub dead.

Palacios, the teacher, said she was shattered by the news. “I started crying,” Palacios recalled. “What I feared most could happen happened. I was very angry at DCFS because they had an investigation going on. They had visited the family.”

Only after Verna’s death did DCFS investigators conduct forensic interviews with her siblings — taking them outside the home to question them separately about mistreatment, instead of interviewing them for a few minutes at home with their parents nearby.

In these sessions, the children readily described being whipped, kicked and abused by Villasana and other adults, records show.

On the way to one interview, Verna’s brother asked a DCFS investigator if Verna was coming back, according to confidential DCFS case notes. The investigator told the boy that Verna “is in his heart and all he had to do is think about her and close his eyes and he would see her.”

Verna’s older brother and sister now live with a foster family out of state.



A+E STILL LIFE

Scientific artistry on display at international taxidermy competition



BRIAN CASSELLA/TRIBUNE PHOTOS

2017 may be the year to buy a home

Inventory is low and prices are rising, so some experts say if you're financially able, strike soon. **Real Estate**

Service dog helps vet fight PTSD

An exuberant golden Labrador-and-mastiff mix "changed my life," says Iraq War veteran. **Life+Style**

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The young and hungry can thrive at the company, but employees who don't buy in are left behind. **Business**

Final

Chicago Tribune



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SUNDAY, MAY 28, 2017

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

7 days lost: Fear, spirituality, tears and peace

Suburban woman, 23, tells how she survived Montana wilderness ordeal

BY CHRISTY GUTOWSKI | Chicago Tribune

Chicago-area native Madeline Connelly spent seven days and six nights lost in the beautiful but brutal wilderness of northwest Montana.

Planning only a short hike on a sunny afternoon while in town visiting family, the 23-year-old from River Forest set off along the trail May 4

without food or water, with only her dog Mogi at her side. A couple of hours later, after stopping to swim, she got turned around and hiked deeper into the wilderness in search of a way out.

Her disappearance set off a frantic search by land and air, garnering national media attention, as hun-

dreds prayed for her safe return more than 1,500 miles away in the west suburban church where she and her three younger sisters went to elementary school and made their religious sacraments.

While many might panic or lose hope, Connelly said in a Tribune interview that she often felt at peace.

The nature enthusiast wasn't a novice.

She has explored the Redwood forests along the Northern California coast,

camped in Illinois' Starved Rock State Park and weathered the freezing cold in North Dakota to protest an oil pipeline project. Connelly also aced a 21-day Arizona backpacking trip in college that included three days of solo exploration.

But none of her adventures come close to all she encountered in the Great Bear Wilderness, a heavily wooded, mountainous forest near Glacier National

Turn to **Hiker**, Page 12



TWO BEAR AIR RESCUE

Madeline Connelly, of River Forest, smiles with rescuers May 10 after she was lost for seven days in Montana.

CHICAGO VIOLENCE THE PEACEMAKERS



JOHN J. KIM/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

The Institute for Nonviolence is assisting "Rozay," left, who is 18 and didn't want his name used, and Zach McBride, 23.

NONVIOLENCE IS A CHOICE

Group's message of peace seeks footing in tough Chicago neighborhood

BY ANNIE SWEENEY | Chicago Tribune

The report at the weekly check-in of the Institute for Nonviolence Chicago was promising.

Only one shooting in the institute's targeted area over the past seven days.

The approximately 30 staff members sitting in a big circle nodded and smiled at the good news.

Teny Gross, who heads the institute in the West Side's Austin neighborhood, tapped a wooden table top. Knock on wood.

After all, the former sergeant in the Israeli army knows that such victories can be fragile and fleeting. He has spent more than two decades combating violence after starting as a

street outreach worker in Boston. Now he's in Chicago at a critical moment for the city and this neighborhood, where nearly 100 people have been shot, 22 fatally, through

Sunday. The institute, the latest effort to reduce runaway gang violence, opened quietly in a large storefront space on Chicago Avenue a year ago with a \$2.5 million annual budget—a combination of city and private money.

As with other anti-violence programs before it, former gang members mediate conflicts on the street. But what distinguishes the institute is its approach—it relies on the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s principles of nonviolence.

Turn to **Austin**, Page 10

DCFS office: Prizes for most case closings

Unit investigated home where girl was found dead

BY DAVID JACKSON, GARY MARX AND DUAA ELDEIB | Chicago Tribune

As state child welfare investigators probed allegations of abuse in the Joliet Township home where 17-month-old Semaj Crosby would later be found dead, their supervisor was launching a contest that awarded \$100 gift cards to the two workers who closed the most cases

in a month, according to agency interviews and internal emails examined by the Tribune.

The third-place winner would get a \$50 gift card.

Evidence of the Joliet office contest emerged as the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services faces mounting criticism from state lawmakers that it is quickly closing abuse and neglect investigations even when basic information has not been gathered and children are left in harm's way.

While the dollar Turn to **DCFS**, Page 9

ANALYSIS

World gets firsthand look at 'America first'

Trump's maiden trip as president leaves allies alarmed

BY MICHAEL A. MEMOLI | Washington Bureau

TAORMINA, Italy — Donald Trump made no secret during the presidential campaign of his disdain for America's trading partners, his skepticism of longtime alliances and his eagerness to refo-

cus U.S. foreign policy on the single-minded pursuit of American security.

That was largely the president the world got as Trump made his way through the Middle East and Western Europe over the last nine days.

Trump's first foreign trip may have produced memorable, and at times cringe-inducing, images of the new president, whether grasping a glow-

Please turn to **Page 27** **TRIP**



Gregg Allman, rock legend with bluesy voice, dies

Nation & World, Page 31

Tom Skilling's forecast High 75 Low 54

Chicago Weather Center: Complete forecast in Nation & World, Page 37

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Chicago Tribune

Sunday, May 28, 2017

DCFS office: Prizes for most case closings

Unit investigated home where girl was found dead

BY DAVID JACKSON, GARY MARX AND DUAA ELDEIB

As state child welfare investigators probed allegations of abuse in the Joliet Township home where 17-month-old Semaj Crosby would later be found dead, their supervisor was launching a contest that awarded \$100 gift cards to the two workers who closed the most cases in a month, according to agency interviews and internal emails examined by the Tribune.

The third-place winner would get a \$50 gift card.

Evidence of the Joliet office contest emerged as the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services faces mounting criticism from state lawmakers that it is quickly closing abuse and neglect investigations even when basic information has not been gathered and children are left in harm's way.

While the dollar amount of the Joliet contest was relatively low, DCFS Director George Sheldon told the Tribune that the competition was improper.

"Offering financial incentives like that I think is an inappropriate step," Sheldon said in an interview Friday. "I think the intentions were good, but the way they handled it wasn't."

State Rep. Mary Flowers, D-Chicago, who this week chaired a legislative hearing on failures of DCFS investigations, reacted sharply when told of the contest by the Tribune, calling it "unethical."

Flowers called for the agency's inspector general to conduct an immediate investigation into the contest, including the children and families who were affected by cases that may have been closed prematurely.

"Children's lives could have been put at risk because of this bad behavior," Flowers said. "This is not a game. These families are in need of help and services — they are not to be played and toyed with. That's not the purpose of DCFS. That is not what they are paid for."

On Friday, DCFS released a new report describing a litany of failures by investigators who opened at least 10 investigations into abuse and neglect in Semaj's home



WILL COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
Semaj, 17 months old, was found dead April 27.

during the two years before her death. Some of those cases were closed within days, and most were “unfounded due to insufficient evidence,” the report shows.

Sheldon said he does not believe the push to close cases quickly played a role in Semaj’s case but said he understands why people “may have that perception.”

“We’ve got to aggressively pursue these cases with a sense of urgency, but I want to make sure that message isn’t misinterpreted to cut corners,” Sheldon said. “I want to make sure that we don’t have unintended consequences. The first thing is to thoroughly investigate the case.”

Senior Deputy Director Neil Skene told the Tribune that DCFS is reviewing whether to discipline any supervisors for the contest. The agency is preparing a notification to all staff warning against such incentives, Skene added.

It’s unclear whether any of the contest winners were involved in the numerous DCFS inquiries at the home where Semaj died.

The contest began in January, according to interviews and emails.

That month, DCFS Joliet office administrator Carolyn Travis sent two dozen frontline child protection investigators an email announcing a contest to reward the worker who closed the most abuse and neglect cases.

“CLOSING CASE CONTEST FOR JANUARY, AND WERE OFF,” said the misspelled subject line of Travis’ email.

Attempts by the Tribune to reach Travis for comment were unsuccessful.

Travis sent contest updates to her investigators, marking them high importance. Two days after the first email, Travis sent another on Jan. 6 with the subject line: “JANUARY CONTEST CASE COUNT AS OF TODAY HOW MANY HAS BEEN CLOSED SO FAR”.

On Jan. 26, Travis sent an email listing the number of cases each worker had closed, with the subject line: “CONTEST — CLOSED CASES SO FAR FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY 2017- 3 BUSINESS LEFT”.

Earlier this month, a Tribune investigation disclosed a separate DCFS program in Cook County called “Blue Star” that offered overtime pay instead of comp time to child protection investigators who significantly boost the percentage of cases they closed within 14 days.

State law gives DCFS 60 days to complete investigations unless supervisors grant extensions because medical and police reports or other critical information is pending. But starting last fall under Blue Star, DCFS tripled the percentage of Cook County abuse and neglect investigations closed within 14 days.

The closure rate rose from about 5 percent per month to 15 percent by March 2017, a Tribune analysis of DCFS data found. Agency goals called for that percentage to double again for at least some Cook County teams: 30 percent of investigations were expected to be closed within 14 days by March 2018, internal DCFS memos on Blue Star showed.

Sheldon has told the Tribune the goal of Blue Star was to help investigators focus on the most serious allegations of harm. But agency officials said they now are reviewing how Blue Star was communicated to workers and whether the case-closing goals are appropriate.

The Tribune also has reported on the shortcomings marring three other DCFS investigations; in those cases, children were beaten or starved to death by caretakers. Investigators did not interview key witnesses, the Tribune found, missed obvious signs of abuse and failed to gather medical reports and other evidence.

The new DCFS report on Semaj’s home details similar investigative shortfalls and provides no indication that DCFS developed safety plans to protect children there — even after hotline calls alleging that a 17-month-old boy was extensively bruised in February and a 3-year-old girl allegedly was molested in March.

In an interview with the Tribune, Taja Price, a Joliet restaurant worker whose 17-month-old son was the alleged victim of the February beating, told the Tribune that she warned DCFS.

“I said, you need to investigate that house — they are beating kids at that house,” Price said.

Her son had stayed in the Joliet Township home for a few days to visit his father. He came home to Price with bruises on his leg, according to the new DCFS report and photographs that Price provided to the Tribune.

Price took the child to a hospital, and a nurse called the DCFS hotline. But Price said a DCFS investigator talked to her only briefly.

“I’m like, something’s going on at the house,” Price said. “I said, somebody needs to investigate and check on these babies. If (my son) is being abused, the rest of them are too.”

She said she never was told the outcome of the case.

“They did not tell me it was indicated or not,” Price said. “They never told me anything. I haven’t gotten no paperwork from them.”

Three months later, according to the report released Friday, the investigation into the bruises on Price’s son remains open. The March molestation charge was unfounded because of insufficient evidence, although welts and bruises were confirmed.

IT'S TIME FOR BEARS' WHITE TO STEP UP
Chicago Sports

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Chicago Tribune



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WEDNESDAY, MAY 31, 2017

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM



ZBIGNIEW BZDAK/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Protesters arrive Tuesday at the Capitol in Springfield as lawmakers tried to find consensus on a budget.

No budget plan in sight as clock ticks

State lawmakers in a familiar standoff

BY MONIQUE GARCIA, KIM GEIGER AND HALEY BEMILLER
Chicago Tribune

SPRINGFIELD — On the eve of the Illinois legislature's planned adjournment, Democrats who control the General Assembly remain in much the same spot they were a year ago, with House Speaker Michael Madigan and Senate President John Cullerton in a standoff over what kind of budget they're going to send to Republican Gov. Bruce Rauner.

Democrats in the Senate have approved a plan that relies on a series of tax increases, but Madigan's members have been reluctant to embrace it amid a veto threat from Rauner. House budget negotiators said they are likely to tinker with the Senate tax plan, but they had yet to unveil an updated proposal late Tuesday. While negotiations

were continuing, doubts remained if Democrats would be able to unite behind a measure that could reach Rauner's desk before they are scheduled to head home Wednesday.

"I don't think it necessarily does us any good to put a revenue bill on the board that does not have enough votes to pass," said Rep. Will Davis, a Homeewood Democrat who is negotiating a potential tax package. "I think that walks us backward and possibly gives the governor a lot of rhetoric."

Even if a last-minute agreement among Democrats could be reached, the Republican governor is unlikely to sign off on a tax hike. Those conflicts set the stage for Illinois' historic budget stalemate to continue into the summer, leaving schools, universities and social serv-

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INSIDE

■ As state budget woes drag on, Northeastern Illinois University to cut about 180 jobs [ChicagoLand, Page 4](#)

■ House advances plan to allow Illinois to sell Thompson Center amid Rauner objections [Page 5](#)

■ Plans to tax and regulate the fantasy sports industry emerge in Springfield [Page 5](#)

TRIBUNE WATCHDOG UPDATE

After disappearance, a flurry of reports



STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Flowers and toys mark the grave of Semaj Crosby, who was found dead last month in her Joliet Township home.

Weeks-old interviews typed up during search for Semaj

BY DAVID JACKSON, GARY MARK AND DUA ELDEB
Chicago Tribune

The morning after 17-month-old Semaj Crosby was reported missing from her Joliet Township home, state Department of Children and Family Services investigators and supervisors went to a strip mall office three miles away and began filing reports.

As police searched frantically for Semaj on April 26, one DCFS investigator over a three-hour span typed up eight reports about important interviews she'd conducted regarding Semaj's family. Some of those interviews occurred seven weeks earlier.

Another DCFS investigator typed reports on her interactions with mental health professionals that



STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Investigators at the Joliet DCFS office belatedly filed reports regarding the family of Semaj Crosby.



WILL COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Semaj, 17 months old, was found dead April 27.

took place four days earlier.

Within 30 hours of her being reported missing, on April 27, Semaj's body was found by police under a soiled living room couch. And still, DCFS investigators continued to file reports on their interactions from days and weeks be-

fore.

The belatedly filed reports appear to violate DCFS' rule that investigators promptly file child abuse and neglect case reports. The Illinois regulator called "Procedures 300" says: "All investigative activities must be docu-

mented in a contact or case note within 48 hours."

Those delayed reports were approved and overseen by supervisors in the state child welfare agency's Joliet office, the Tribune found in an examination of

Turn to DCFS, Page 10

IMMIGRATION AT A CROSSROADS

U.S. lifting curb on refugee arrivals

After dip, State Dept. to up admission

BY MANYA BRACHEAR PASHMAN | Chicago Tribune

With President Donald Trump's attempt to lower the cap on refugees still tied up in court, the State Department has told its overseas partners that it will increase the number of refugees admitted and any refugees who have been thoroughly screened should be booked for travel to the U.S.

The move comes after a sharp dip in refugee arrivals to Illinois and the U.S. since Trump took office.

Between October and April, Illinois received 1,401 refugees from more than two dozen countries.

But each month, fewer and fewer have arrived. In December, 273 refugees resettled in Illinois. In April, only 92 arrived, a 67 percent dip, according to data from the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, which oversees the state's refugee social services.

The Trump administration is fighting in court to preserve the president's executive order that reduces the ceiling for refugee admissions by more than half this federal fiscal year. Officials at

Turn to Refugees, Page 9



ABEL URIBE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

PLAYING TO HELP FELLOW MUSICIAN

Jazz saxophonist Diane Ellis, pictured with her mother, Josephine, suffered a stroke on stage in April 2016. A year later, she is still struggling from the after-effects. On June 14, more than 30 of Chicago's top names in jazz will play a benefit to help Ellis pay for her health care costs and other expenses.

Howard Reich In A+E, Page 3

A White House staff shake-up shapes up

In 1st move, communications chief out

BY NOAH BIERMAN AND BRIAN BENNETT
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — White House press secretary Sean Spicer sparred with reporters about "fake news," their anonymous sources and erroneous coverage of President Donald Trump on Tuesday until he'd had enough. He abruptly left the press podium as reporters continued shouting questions.

The 30-minute televised encounter vividly portrayed the strained relations between the administration and much of the news media — a tension at the center of the latest White House ef-

orts to shake up the staff in hopes of changing the president's standing with the public amid rising anxiety over investigations into his campaign's contacts with Russia.

Spicer's barbs echoed the views of Trump, who claims that unfair coverage has helped push his public approval ratings to historic lows. But Trump also blames his aides, and on Tuesday the White House announced the resignation of his communications director — the first of several expected staff changes.

In a statement, White House chief of staff Reince Priebus said Mike

Turn to Shake-up, Page 13



Tom Skilling's forecast High 71 Low 52

Chicago Weather Center: Complete forecast on back of A+E

\$1.99 city and suburbs, \$2.50 elsewhere 169th year No. 151 © Chicago Tribune



Chicago Tribune

Wednesday, May 31, 2017



STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTO

Flowers and toys mark the grave of Semaj Crosby, who was found dead last month in her Joliet Township home.

TRIBUNE WATCHDOG UPDATE

After disappearance, a flurry of reports

Weeks-old interviews typed up during search for Semaj

BY DAVID JACKSON, GARY MARX AND DUAA ELDEIB

The morning after 17-month-old Semaj Crosby was reported missing from her Joliet Township home, state Department of Children and Family Services investigators and supervisors went to a strip mall office three miles away and began filing reports.

As police searched frantically for Semaj on April 26, one DCFS investigator over a three-hour span typed up eight reports about important interviews she'd conducted regarding Semaj's family. Some of those interviews occurred seven weeks earlier.

Another DCFS investigator typed reports on her interactions with mental health professionals that took place four days earlier.

Within 30 hours of her being reported missing, on April 27, Semaj's body was found by police under a soiled living room couch. And still, DCFS investigators continued to file reports on their interactions from days and weeks before.

The belatedly filed reports appear to violate DCFS' rule that investigators promptly file child abuse and neglect case reports. The Illinois regulation called

“Procedures 300” says: “All investigative activities must be documented in a contact or case note within 48 hours.”

Those delayed reports were approved and overseen by supervisors in the state child welfare agency’s Joliet office, the Tribune found in an examination of more than 200 pages of internal DCFS investigators’ case files about agency contacts with Semaj’s family in the months before she disappeared and was found dead.

The belated reports describe DCFS staff working assiduously to investigate the conditions for Semaj and six other children living in the cramped, grimy rental. Their investigations followed a March 4 hotline allegation that a 3-year-old girl was molested there, as well as a separate April 21 report that a child in the home had threatened suicide.

On Friday, DCFS Director George Sheldon released a 22-page Quality Assurance Review of DCFS shortfalls in protecting Semaj and other children in the home as investigators opened 10 abuse and neglect probes in the two years after April 2015. Sheldon has said that report demonstrates his commitment to transparency and to improving on deficiencies.

But that review did not mention the weeks-late filing of investigative reports documented in the agency’s electronic case notes. The review also failed to mention that supervisors repeatedly approved files that were missing basic reports regarding Semaj, and that administrators also signed off on the flurry of belated reports.

Asked why the DCFS investigators’ late report filing was not mentioned in the Quality Assurance Review, DCFS Senior Deputy Director Neil Skene said: “It feels to me like we just missed it.”

More than just paperwork, the reports are a key part of how the agency protects children, ensuring that various agencies and investigators are working together, helping them to identify whether greater intervention is necessary for a child’s safety, experts and investigators told the Tribune.

In light of the Tribune’s reporting, Skene said, the department will review the potential impact of the belated note filing on the agency’s efforts to protect Semaj and her siblings.

“We do want to go back and see if anything in those notes that were entered late might have changed the course of the investigation in some fashion,” he said. If a child’s safety has been assured, filing notes a few days late “is not all that unusual or unreasonable. ... On the other hand, seven weeks is unreasonable. There’s no question about that.”

DCFS Inspector General Denise Kane said her staff noticed the belated filings during a standard review following Semaj’s death, and opened an investigation.

In such cases, Kane said her office tries to determine why case notes were filed late, whether investigators actually did the interviews and investigative work described in the tardy reports, and what role supervisors played in the delays. Kane declined to comment further or provide any specific details about her office’s probe, saying only, “Investigative notes have to be timely in order to have proper supervision.”

Kane said she has also opened an investigation into a case-closing contest in the Joliet office that awarded prizes to investigators who closed the most cases, after the Tribune published a report Friday on it.

Late reports ‘challenge’ investigations

DCFS’ internal review released last week had criticized an agency supervisor’s late filing of notes about consultations with a caseworker from the private contractor Children’s Home + Aid who was helping Semaj’s family get mental health and medical services. The notes from seven of those 12 consultations dating back to Sep-

tember 2016 were entered in a flurry on April 26, the day after Semaj was reported missing.

“This late entry of narrative information ... (can) challenge the credibility of the supervision process,” the review noted.

Former DCFS chief Jess McDonald told the Tribune the belated filing of investigative reports represents a management failure.

“If there is a significant gap between the time of contacts and the time of reports, supervisors should be aware,” he said.

Often the issue is overwhelming caseloads, McDonald added. “Too much to do ends up having people not do the right things, and usually it is a child or their family that pays the price.”

There are several reasons why child protective investigators say prompt reporting can save children’s lives.

Most serious cases are typically handled collaboratively by agency teams who all enter their case reports into the same Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System, or SACWIS. The lack of up-to-date information can hinder team members who must share assignments and make urgent decisions, and supervisors who assign new tasks and authorize protective custody of youth when intervention is necessary.

In addition, child protective investigators told the Tribune, they are trained to note the demeanor and vocal inflection of people they interview and to pay attention to subtleties such as eye contact, then input reports while those impressions are fresh.

“It is imperative to get your notes in immediately so you can recall the specific details,” retired DCFS investigator and former agency acting director Denise Gonzales told the Tribune.

In 2015 and 2016, DCFS moved to suspend or sanction 12 investigators for failing to promptly enter case notes into SACWIS, a Tribune analysis of state disciplinary records found. In eight other cases the investigators did not “complete and/or document” investigative activities, those state records say. DCFS also reprimanded one supervisor who failed to ensure that an investigator had filed timely reports over several weeks, those state records show. The final outcome of those disciplinary cases could not immediately be determined Tuesday.

Cook County Public Guardian Robert Harris, whose office represents state wards in juvenile court, said the lengthy delays in filing notes may indicate that Joliet child protection investigators were juggling excessive caseloads and “playing catch-up.”

“At a minimum, it just shows that they are either overwhelmed with cases and aren’t able to put the notes in, or that these notes are more notes of convenience than they are of actual casework,” Harris said.

“It certainly seems bizarre that all of a sudden they are going to get all of these notes in at the last minute.”

A veteran investigator

When Semaj was reported missing April 25 at 6:28 p.m., the community search included a local TV station helicopter circling overhead as police and volunteers combed the area.

“MEDIA case,” said the initial DCFS report on the missing toddler.

Starting at 9:32 a.m. the next morning, one Joliet DCFS investigator — a 19-year agency veteran — filed reports that documented assignments she completed in early March, including in-person assessments of children in Semaj’s home, interviews with family members and contacts with police and medical professionals, according to government records examined by the Tribune.



STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTO

Investigators at the Joliet DCFS office belatedly filed reports regarding the family of Semaj Crosby.

The veteran investigator filed eight such reports by 12:14 p.m. — then one more the next morning, after Semaj was found dead, describing her efforts weeks earlier to track down the alleged abuser of a girl in the home.

Then, on May 2 and 3, she filed four more reports about events that took place in previous weeks, again detailing her earlier attempts to locate the child’s alleged abuser.

She was investigating the March 4 hotline allegation that a 3-year-old girl was beaten and molested in Semaj’s house on Louis Road. That girl was taken to a hospital with reported swelling of her private parts as well as “bruises and scratches all over her body” and “a belt buckle mark on (her) arm and on her leg,” one DCFS report said.

The 3-year-old girl had been in the care of her mother’s boyfriend — a felon with a history of domestic violence who went on the lam after the injuries came to light.

In one of several similar examples, the veteran investigator on April 26 submitted a report saying that seven weeks earlier, on March 7, she had a critical phone conversation with the 3-year-old’s biological father, who was in touch with the youth but not living at the house on Louis Road. In that conversation, the father revealed that the alleged abuser “was heard whopping” the girl, and he suspected his other children were abused in the home because now they are “afraid of the shower and they are trembling and crying.”

The veteran investigator also completed a series of basic substance abuse, domestic violence or criminal background screenings of adults in the home on May 3, just before DCFS’ 60-day mandated deadline for completing child abuse and neglect investigations, but long after she was assigned the case on March 6.

Her supervisor filed repeated notes in March and April stating that she was reviewing the file and had outlined tasks that needed completion — but didn’t mention the missing reports or series of late filings.

An agency intern

The last DCFS investigator to see Semaj alive at about 4 p.m. April 25 was an intern who had just joined the agency in July 2016. She was assigned to investigate

the alleged neglect of another child from the home on April 21 at his school after the boy threatened to stab himself with a knife or shoot himself with a BB gun, saying “I won’t come back to life.”

It wasn’t until April 26 that she filed notes reporting her interviews on April 21 with a physician and with a mental health professional who worked to admit the boy to a psychiatric hospital, DCFS case records show.

The physician recounted the boy saying “his granny and aunt hurt him at home. They hit him with their hands or belt everywhere on his body. ... He does not know why they hit him.”

The intern had ranked fifth among the 24 Joliet office investigators in the DCFS case-closing contest in January, in which the two investigators who closed the most abuse and neglect probes that month each won \$100 gift cards while the third-place winner got \$50.

An agency spokeswoman said the competition only lasted that month.

On the morning after Semaj was reported missing, the intern filed voluminous notes, vividly conveying her impressions of the trash-strewn three-bedroom rental where the girl lived. And she described the playful girl in the gray shirt with the cat on the front and mismatched pink and gray socks “running around the house playing with her brothers and drinking out of a sippy cup.”

Semaj soon relaxed with a pink pacifier, the intern reported.

“There were no defects in the home that would endanger the health and safety of the children.”

Two and a half hours later, Semaj was reported missing.

A+E
FALL ARTS PREVIEW
TV AND FILM

Plus, Greg Kot's book on Mavis Staples to join roster of "One Book, One Chicago"

Welcome to the edge of autumn

Your guide for what's hip this fall. Trib magazine



CHICAGO SPORTS

THE HUMAN JOYSTICK
TARIK COHEN

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Chicago Tribune



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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2017

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

Workers call DCFS field office 'toxic'



A girl holds a sign at a news conference held this month by a group seeking answers in the death of Semaj Crosby. CHRIS SWEDA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Staff overloaded as allegations poured in from home where tot later was found dead

By DAVID JACKSON AND GARY MARX | Chicago Tribune

The state agency responsible for protecting the children in Semaj Crosby's home assigned unmanageable caseloads to investigators in its Joliet field office and allowed supervisors there to intimidate and mistreat workers, the Tribune has found.

As allegations of child abuse poured in from the Joliet Township house

where 17-month-old Semaj would be found dead in April, investigators in the Department of Children and Family Services' local office sometimes handled 30 or more new cases per month — well over nationally recognized standards.

Meanwhile, supervisors often bullied staff members and doled out the easiest assignments to favored

workers, according to Tribune interviews with current and former investigators. Some of the most sensitive and complex abuse cases were given to interns — the last DCFS investigator who saw Semaj alive, hours before she was reported missing, was an intern, according to DCFS records.

Semaj's death remains under investigation by Will County authorities more than four months after she was found wedged under a couch in her home, where at least six adults and as many as 15 children lived.

On Friday, the coroner announced she had died of asphyxia and declared the death a homicide. The case has rattled DCFS and lawmakers, who asked how the agency could have failed to protect Semaj despite 11 investigations at her home beginning in April 2015.

The agency commissioned two reports on lessons it had learned from Semaj's case. The reports found that investigators never determined the identities of many adults who

Turn to DCFS, Page 9

Be vigilant in wake of Equifax data breach

Now that a massive data breach at Equifax has compromised Social Security numbers and other information — essentially giving away the keys to the identities of nearly half of Americans — it's just a matter of time before crimes start showing up. Consumers must now be more attentive to the layers of authentication and passwords they use for their online accounts. A wave of phishing scams could also be in the offing. Gail MarksJarvis in Business



Ill. comptroller stands up to tough guy with a "Say cheese!"

Susana Mendoza was on a bike ride with her family when a black pickup truck barreled through a red light and a few blocks farther down rear-ended a car, causing a multivehicle crash. He might never have been caught if not for Mendoza. She got in his face and took an amazing video. She didn't know who he was. But he's a rather large man well-versed in the Chicago Way. John Kass, Page 2



Guide to new and redesigned cars coming in 2018

Rides



Divers from the Wisconsin Historical Society last month measure the J.M. Allmendinger, which sank in 1895 near Port Washington, Wis. CHRIS WALKER/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Seeking sanctuary for shipwrecks

As many as 100 or more watery graves off Wisconsin may get federal protection

By TONY BRISCOE
 Chicago Tribune

SHEBOYGAN, Wis. — After a year of scouring the depths of Lake Michigan with a sonar-equipped fishing boat, Steve Radovan finally got a hit on the grayscale monitor in the captain's cabin in May 2016.

The 71-year-old shipwreck enthusiast powered down the Discovery's engines and dropped a waterproof camera attached to a rope into roughly 300 feet of water. The images revealed a three-masted barkentine, covered in mussels and algae but lying on the bottom still



The Allmendinger broke up in the waves after running aground and now lies 15 feet down. Its boiler can be seen on the lake bottom. CENTER FOR ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS, BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

largely intact. After reporting the finding to the state of Wisconsin, he learned the foundered ship was the Mojave.

With a cargo of 19,500 bushels of wheat, the ship set sail from Chicago en route to Buffalo, N.Y., in 1864. The Mojave was spotted by the crew of a passing ship as it dropped into a trough of stormy waters. A small boat and cabin doors belonging to the lost ship were later recovered on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, but the vessel lay deep below the surface for over a century.

"This is the stuff the mov-

Turn to Shipwrecks, Page 14



Tom Skilling's forecast High 86 Low 64

Chicago Weather Center: Complete forecast in Nation & World, Page 39

\$3.99 city and suburbs, \$4.99 elsewhere
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Chicago Tribune

Sunday, September 17, 2017



CHRIS SWEDA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTO

A girl holds a sign at a news conference held this month by a group seeking answers in the death of Semaj Crosby.

Workers call DCFS field office 'toxic'

Staff overloaded as allegations poured in from home where tot later was found dead

BY DAVID JACKSON AND GARY MARX

The state agency responsible for protecting the children in Semaj Crosby's home assigned unmanageable caseloads to investigators in its Joliet field office and allowed supervisors there to intimidate and mistreat workers, the Tribune has found.

As allegations of child abuse poured in from the Joliet Township house where 17-month-old Semaj would be found dead in April, investigators in the Department of Children and Family Services' local office sometimes handled 30 or more new cases per month — well over nationally recognized standards.

Meanwhile, supervisors often bullied staff members and doled out the easiest assignments to favored workers, according to Tribune interviews with current and former investigators. Some of the most sensitive and complex abuse cases were given to interns — the last DCFS investigator who saw Semaj alive, hours before she was reported missing, was an intern, according to DCFS records.

Semaj's death remains under investigation by Will County authorities more than

four months after she was found wedged under a couch in her home, where at least six adults and as many as 15 children lived. On Friday, the coroner announced she had died of asphyxia and declared the death a homicide. The case has rattled DCFS and lawmakers, who asked how the agency could have failed to protect Semaj despite 11 investigations at her home beginning in April 2015.

The agency commissioned two reports on lessons it had learned from Semaj's case. The reports found that investigators never determined the identities of many adults who cared for children in the bug-infested home and that cases were closed quickly after those adults assured them the kids were safe.

DCFS has said the reports reflect the agency's willingness to answer tough questions and correct problems. But neither report addressed what workers described as chronic mismanagement of the agency's understaffed Joliet office.

The two official DCFS reports — an internal study completed in May and a July analysis by Casey Family Programs, a Seattle-based nonprofit — also failed to mention other problems the Tribune has previously reported. In January, the Joliet office began awarding \$100 gift cards to investigators who closed the most cases quickly, a practice that the agency later called a serious mistake and said it quickly stopped. The Tribune also found that DCFS investigators filed crucial reports on Semaj's case only after she died, with some interviews and findings documented several weeks late, in violation of agency policy.

A long-standing federal court consent decree known as "B.H." effectively prohibits DCFS from assigning an investigator more than 153 new cases per year. But in 2015, as the Joliet office began its series of investigations at Semaj's home, two investigators were handed more than 250 new cases and five others had more than 220, according to DCFS records. Caseloads got even worse in 2016 and the start of this year.

Investigating a case involves conducting multiple interviews with children and family members, as well as doctors, police and others, and gathering sensitive law enforcement and medical reports. Interviews can be complicated by domestic violence, drug abuse and criminal activity in the home, and investigators sometimes face threats, harassment and even assaults as they weigh whether the state should take custody of endangered children.

Office investigation

In the wake of Semaj's death, DCFS Inspector General Denise Kane is investigating the heavy caseloads at the Joliet office, the Tribune has learned. Kane declined to comment.

DCFS officials told the Tribune they have been making a concerted effort to reduce caseloads in the office and are getting the problems under control. The agency temporarily brought back retired employees to close out open investigations, recently changed the requirements for hiring new investigators and took steps to fill vacancies faster, they said.

"We have been working aggressively," said Neil Skene, senior deputy director for strategy and performance. "Today we have a much more stable workforce than two years ago, and we are beginning to actually get ahead of the problem."

State Rep. Mary Flowers, D-Chicago, said she was not convinced that problems at the Joliet office have been solved.

"In order to save the children, we are going to have to clean that office out," Flowers said. "Obviously, the quality of the people in that office is having a negative impact on the families in that county. They are not doing their job. The poor families of this state need to become a priority."

Four current and former Joliet field office investigators complained to the Tri-



STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTO

Taja Price told DCFS that her son Jordan came home with long bruises on his legs after visiting his father at the home where Semaj Crosby was living.

bune that supervisors doled out easier assignments to a favored few, among other allegations. All spoke to reporters on condition that they not be named, as they still held government jobs and feared workplace retribution.

“The good workers got (thrown) under the bus,” said one former child protection investigator. “It was about who knew who.”

Another investigator described being overworked and pressured by supervisors to close cases quickly, saying she left the office after about a year because of the “toxic” work environment.

She described driving around Will County all day, then returning to the office shortly before 5 p.m., only to be given another assignment or having to spend hours inputting her case notes. “I was never home,” she said. “It was terrible, just terrible. I just couldn’t take the stress.”

Records show high turnover in the Joliet office. Of the 21 investigators listed in internal DCFS caseworker rosters in January 2015, all but four were gone from the office by July 2017, the Tribune found.

Over the same period, Northern Illinois DCFS area chief Desiree Silva repeatedly sent memos to then-operations chief Michael Ruppe about the urgent need to fill empty investigative positions. In one report she described a “vacancy crisis” across DCFS’ northern region, which includes the Joliet office.

George Sheldon, former director of DCFS, traveled to the office in June 2015 to address staff complaints but allowed supervisors to attend his sessions, and few if any workers felt comfortable enough to be candid, according to Tribune interviews.

By 2016, nine Joliet investigators — including newcomers — were above the B.H. limit, and eight of them handled more than 200 new cases, internal DCFS case tracking records show. One investigator handled 283 new cases last year, agency case-tracking data shows.

The first investigation in Semaj’s home, in April 2015, was conducted by an investigator who was assigned 21 new cases that month and 22 the next. She found credible evidence that one of the men who sometimes lived in the home, Semaj’s father,

James Crosby, had abused his 5-year-old son by whipping him with a belt after the boy got in trouble at school, government records show.

The second investigation, launched a year later, was handled by a supervisor who took on a high caseload. She was assigned 39 new cases in April 2016, 24 in May and 17 the next month, DCFS records show. For a time, the investigation was handed off to a retired former investigator who had been brought back temporarily to close pending cases, the Tribune found.

Insufficient evidence

Ultimately, the supervisor concluded that there was insufficient evidence to sustain an allegation that children from Semaj's home were running loose at all hours in a nearby park while adults in the house were selling drugs and drinking, DCFS records show.

DCFS later learned that the supervisor had failed to cite the previous abuse investigation in her report — probably because an incorrect name was used for Semaj's mother, Sheri Gordon. Similar shortfalls and errors emerged in subsequent cases as investigators probed allegations that the children in Semaj's home were beaten, molested and neglected.

When Semaj's 7-year-old brother reported in January that their mother, Gordon, hit him in the head with a shoe repeatedly and did the same to his siblings, the case was assigned to an investigator who handled 271 new cases in the previous year, the Tribune found. He was a relative newcomer to the office, getting his first cases in September 2015.

He closed this allegation within a week, citing insufficient evidence, after the children in the house denied any excessive corporal punishment and an outside social worker told the DCFS investigator she “did not have concerns related to the allegations,” according to a report.

Pressure on investigators

Will County Board Minority Leader Herbert Brooks Jr., D-Joliet — a former state elder abuse investigator who has been pushing for answers in the Semaj Crosby case — said he understands how high caseloads can add to pressure on investigators and empathizes with the local DCFS workers.

“You only have two eyes, and you can't be eyes on all the cases all the time, and that's when something might fall through the cracks,” Brooks said. “So it does weigh heavily, heavily on the caseworker. Sometimes you can't sleep at night because a ball was dropped on your watch.”

One of the 11 DCFS investigations at Semaj's home concerned the toddler son of Joliet restaurant worker Taja Price. The boy had stayed there for a few days in February to visit his father but came home with long bruises on his legs, according to DCFS records and an interview with Price. No one has been charged in that case.

The investigation, which records show was given to a DCFS worker with less than six months on the job, had not been completed by the time Semaj's body was found more than two months later.

If the investigation had been more prompt and thorough, Price said, authorities might have taken steps to protect Semaj.

“I think that baby would still be alive,” Price said. “She could have been saved.”



FOOD & DINING

SAUSAGE KING IN CHICAGO

Pepperoni may be tops across the country, but ground pork mixture rules on pizza here

JOSEPH HERNANDEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Chicago Tribune



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WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 23, 2017

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

Police, DCFS cutbacks strain child sex crime investigations



STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

A child runs on playground equipment outside the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center recently before heading inside for a therapy session.

Tribune analysis: Arrest rates decline as staff numbers shrink

BY DAVID JACKSON AND GARY MARX
Chicago Tribune

Whimsically designed to suggest the gingerbread castle a child might build, the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center has earned national acclaim for its investigations of sex assault and abuse cases involving victims as young as a few months old.

In the bright facility on South Damen Avenue, police detectives and prose-

cutors team with child welfare investigators, doctors and therapists to bring abusers to justice and remove children from dangerous homes.

But even as the center's caseload has steadily grown — to a record 2,450 child abuse reports during the 12 months ended in June — staff cutbacks have strained its operations and alarmed some of the specialists working there, the Tribune found in an analysis of government records

and interviews with workers.

The number of police assigned to the special investigations unit based at the center fell from 38 detectives, officers, sergeants and lieutenants in 2011 to 21 in June of this year, according to police rosters obtained by the Tribune under open records laws.

The arrest rate for the child sex crimes handled at the center also declined from 24 percent in 2011 to

13 percent in 2016, according to a Tribune analysis of police data on 5,800 cases closed during those six years. The newspaper's analysis excluded open investigations as well as those in which police concluded that no crime occurred.

Former police Detective Bob Midlowski, who was assigned to the center when it opened in 2001 and worked there until 2014, said he left because he felt he could not do his

job anymore.

"As people retired they weren't replaced," he said. "As equipment broke down it wasn't replaced. As cars broke down they weren't replaced. It basically went downhill and it never got any better. It is a shadow of what it used to be."

High caseloads also have been a problem in the state Department of Children and Family Services

Turn to **Cutbacks**, Page 11



ALEX BRANDON/AP

President Donald Trump on Tuesday attacked critics of his response to the violence in Charlottesville, Va.

Trump pumps up base in Ariz. rally

Amid protests, president calls for unity, blasts media

BY JOHN WAGNER, JENNA JOHNSON AND DANIELLE PAQUETTE
The Washington Post

PHOENIX — President Donald Trump staged a boisterous campaign rally in Arizona's capital on Tuesday night, basking in the adoration of thousands of supporters and brushing off security concerns voiced by the city's mayor and other Democratic officials.

"You were there from the start, you've been there every day since, and I believe me Arizona, I will never forget it," Trump said at the outset of his remarks, referencing a large crowd he drew at the site early in his campaign.

Protesters gathered outside the Phoenix Convention Center before the rally, and they stayed in the streets after the event, prompting police to release what they said was pepper gas. Clouds of the gas filled the night air as the president's supporters began leaving the convention center.

Turn to **Trump**, Page 17

Rauner bucks party on immigration bill

Governor also amends remarks on group's cartoon

BY KIM GEIGER
Chicago Tribune

Republican Gov. Bruce Rauner will sign into law a bill that would protect immigrants who are in the country illegally from being detained solely because of their immigration status, according to his office.

The decision to approve the controversial legislation marks a victory for immigrant advocates and a defeat for the more conservative members of the governor's party, who had lobbied against the bill.

Rauner spokeswoman Laurel Patrick said the governor would sign the

Inside

House Speaker Michael Madigan cites "progress" on an education funding measure, canceling a legislative session and vote on an override of Gov. Bruce Rauner's veto. **Chicagoland**, Page 4

legislation Monday, but she did not say where the signing would take place.

Rauner had indicated Friday that he was supportive of the bill, noting on WBEZ-FM 91.5's "Morning Shift" that it was "supported by law enforcement, it's supported by the business community, it's supported by the immigration community."

"I think it seems very

Turn to **Rauner**, Page 9



ERIN HOOLEY/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Yingying Zhang's boyfriend, Xiaolin Hou, mother Lifeng Ye and brother Xinyang Zhang at a news conference.

Student's family speaks of ordeal

The family of missing Chinese U. of I. scholar Yingying Zhang gave their most extensive comments on her disappearance in an emotional news conference Tuesday in Champaign. **Chicagoland**, Page 5

Cubs ready for battle in NL Central

With the Cubs in a tight divisional race with the Cardinals, Brewers and Pirates, the Tribune's Paul Sullivan breaks down the contenders heading into the final six weeks. **Chicago Sports**



Video of shooting played at cop's trial

Officer injured 2 after aiming into car full of teens

BY GREGORY PRATT
Chicago Tribune

A lawyer for a Chicago police officer on trial on civil rights charges defended his shooting into a car full of teens, calling the decision a "split-second" choice that cops must make in the city's most dangerous neighborhoods.

In opening remarks to a federal jury, attorney Daniel Herbert emphasized that the shooting in 2013 unfolded in just a few seconds and that Officer Marco Proano had "no time to stop and reassess."

A prosecutor, meanwhile, alleged that Proano

violated basic principles of policing and abused his police powers when he emptied his gun into the Toyota Avalon.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Georgia Alexakis ridiculed Proano's defense of the shooting that night — that he opened fire to help a teen who was hanging outside the car when a back-seat passenger put the Toyota into reverse by pushing on the accelerator with his hands. She noted that a bullet fragment was recovered inches from the teen he claimed to be helping.

The trial marks the first time in at least 15 years that a Chicago police officer is facing federal criminal charges stemming from an on-duty shooting.

The civil rights charges

Turn to **Shooting**, Page 9



Tom Skilling's forecast High 76 Low 57

Chicago Weather Center: Complete forecast on back page of A+E section

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Chicago Tribune

Wednesday, August 23, 2017



STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTO

A child runs on playground equipment outside the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center recently before heading inside for a therapy session.

Police, DCFS cutbacks strain child sex crime investigations

Tribune analysis: Arrest rates decline as staff numbers shrink

BY DAVID JACKSON AND GARY MARX

Whimsically designed to suggest the gingerbread castle a child might build, the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center has earned national acclaim for its investigations of sex assault and abuse cases involving victims as young as a few months old.

In the bright facility on South Damen Avenue, police detectives and prosecutors team with child welfare investigators, doctors and therapists to bring abusers to justice and remove children from dangerous homes.

But even as the center's caseload has steadily grown — to a record 2,450 child abuse reports during the 12 months ended in June — staff cutbacks have strained its operations and alarmed some of the specialists working there, the Tribune found in an analysis of government records and interviews with workers.

The number of police assigned to the special investigations unit based at the center fell from 38 detectives, officers, sergeants and lieutenants in 2011 to 21 in June of this year, according to police rosters obtained by the Tribune under open records laws.

The arrest rate for the child sex crimes handled at the center also declined from 24 percent in 2011 to 13 percent in 2016, according to a Tribune analysis of police data on 5,800 cases closed during those six years. The newspaper's analysis excluded open investigations as well as those in which police concluded that no crime occurred.

Former police Detective Bob Midlowski, who was assigned to the center when it opened in 2001 and worked there until 2014, said he left because he felt he could not do his job anymore.

"As people retired they weren't replaced," he said. "As equipment broke down it wasn't replaced. As cars broke down they weren't replaced. It basically went downhill and it never got any better. It is a shadow of what it used to be."

High caseloads also have been a problem in the state Department of Children and Family Services unit that teams with police at the center. Eighteen DCFS child protective investigators staffed the center in 2001, but in June there were only 11, state records and interviews show. Several of the DCFS investigators handled as many as 30 open cases in recent months — well above nationally recognized standards — and one had 50 open cases in March, internal agency case-tracking records show.

"Their caseloads are crazy," said Dr. Majorie Fujara, who heads the center's medical unit and works closely with the DCFS investigators. "I will talk to them about a (victim's) medical exam and they will say, 'Which case is that?'"

Fujara's medical staff at the center has dropped from four doctors to two, although she plans on hiring a third physician this month. "There is more work with fewer staff, and we can't maintain the quality we had 10 or 15 years ago," said Fujara, a physician who has worked at the center's medical unit for 17 years and run it since 2016.

Chicago police and DCFS told the Tribune the center is functioning smoothly with no drop-off in effectiveness, though center Executive Director Char Rivette expressed concern about staffing cutbacks.

"Any lack of resources in any one of the partnerships creates an immediate domino effect on timeliness to get stuff done," Rivette said. "People are working a lot — long hours, sacrificing their own personal lives, sacrificing spending time with their own families. There is just stress on the system."

National headlines have focused on Chicago's gun violence, which last year took the lives of 36 children and teens under the age of 17 and left at least 288 others wounded, according to Tribune reports.

The sexual attacks represent a less visible pattern of violence against Chicago children, one that typically takes place behind closed doors but also scars hundreds each year. Some 60 percent of the center's incoming sexual assault and abuse reports concern children age 12 or younger, said spokesman Trevor Peterson.

The nonprofit center is part of a statewide network of 39 similar facilities where government agencies and center workers coordinate child abuse investigations. With its leafy courtyard, blue slide in the playground and toys and books scattered about, the facility is designed to put young victims at ease.

In a waiting room on a recent morning, two preteen girls played the board game Candy Land with a staffer as the movie "Horton Hears a Who!" ran on a nearby monitor.

Then a center worker took one girl's hand as they walked down a hallway to one of four forensic interview rooms. Equipped with a microphone and cameras, these rooms are the stage for wrenching dramas as children sit one after the other to recount details of abuse.

Behind a two-way mirror, detectives, DCFS investigators and prosecutors take



STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTO

Charlie Hollendonner, left, and Ron Jasica, Chicago police detectives, investigate a potential sex crime against a child in July. Both work out of the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center.

notes and assist the interviewer during short breaks.

“We explain to the children everything before we start,” Peterson said. “We tell them who is on the other side and why they are here.”

Tough cases to investigate

Chicago police said their staffing at the center was adequate and the effectiveness of the detectives working there has not diminished.

“Everyone would like additional resources,” said Lt. Patricia Casey, commanding officer of the Police Department's special investigations unit at the center. She said the department anticipates assigning more detectives to the center by the end of the summer.

“I'm not sure exactly how many detectives they had years ago, but I can tell you that our detectives that are here will work around the clock if they have to in order to make sure that a child is getting the utmost attention when they are a victim of sexual assault or trauma,” Casey said. “No matter how many detectives are in this building, I can assure you that they are getting the job done.”

The police also disputed the Tribune's arrest-rate analysis, saying the results do not match their own statistics.

The Tribune based its analysis on data from Clearmap, the city's public portal to data on all crimes committed since 2001. Police said they purge from Clearmap all reports for which officers ultimately concluded that no crime occurred — known as “unfounded” cases — but include such cases in their own calculations of arrest rates.

At the Tribune's request, police provided detailed internal data on the 2,450 unfounded child sex abuse cases that were handled at the center since 2010. After these cases were added, the arrest rate still fell, but less dramatically: from 15.4 percent in 2011 to 11.6 percent last year.

Adding a wrinkle to these calculations: Chicago police in 2014 tightened their definition of what constituted an unfounded child sex abuse report, meaning more unsolved cases were included in the Clearmap data.

Experts say low arrest rates are to be expected with child sex crimes.

“All of these cases are difficult to investigate and prosecute,” said Margaret Ogarrek, supervisor of the Cook County state's attorney's office at the center.



STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTO

Dr. Marjorie Fujara is one of two full-time doctors at the center. In 2001, there were four full-time doctors on staff.

South Sider Frank Nateras, 30, was charged in July 2016 with raping a 3-year-old relative over a one-month period but pleaded guilty to misdemeanor battery in March after his attorney successfully challenged the statement the girl made at the center. He was released after spending 240 days in jail while awaiting trial.

Only a fraction of the cases include physical evidence, national experts note, and a child's account may be challenged not just by the alleged offender but also by other family members.

"A victim's outcry could destroy a family, make the family homeless if the perp is the sole breadwinner," said Fujara. "Many times mothers don't believe their daughter when they say that a trusted person — a brother or stepfather — sexually assaulted them. These kids feel guilty that what they've done has disrupted their whole household. They are very aware of what happens as a result of their outcry."

Fujara said she has seen some young victims become suicidal after the impact of their report becomes clear.

That's why it's critical to conclude the investigation as quickly as possible — something that has become increasingly difficult at a center with fewer staff and resources, Fujara said.

"Time is the enemy," Fujara said. "What happens is, you deal with the case in front of you. The other ones — the case you saw yesterday and you need more information on — goes on the back burner and sometimes people forget about them."

Meanwhile, the heinous nature of the crimes can haunt even the most experienced detectives. The job can be so intense that the center has a "breathing room" where child protection specialists can decompress.

"For some of the detectives, it was very difficult," said Virginia Zic-Schlomas, a former police youth division officer who worked at the center for about two years. "There is no way you don't take it home with you."

'We get confessions'

DCFS officials at the center told the Tribune that they have managed to reduce investigator caseloads in recent months and could temporarily assign additional investigators there if needed. The worker who in March shouldered 50 pending cases recently had 21, said agency spokeswoman Veronica Resa. There are currently three child protection workers with 30 or more open cases, Resa said.



STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTO

Char Rivette is executive director of the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center, which has earned national acclaim.

The Tribune has reported that DCFS administrators last year began directing the center's child welfare investigators to rapidly increase the percentage of cases they closed within 14 days, in order to cull out frivolous allegations and focus agency workers on the most serious instances.

But amid the push to speed investigations, DCFS saw a drop in the percentage of cases in which they found evidence to substantiate abuse allegations, a Tribune analysis of agency data shows.

The DCFS investigators at the center "indicated" more than 30 percent of their abuse cases in 2015 — meaning investigators found credible evidence of harm to children in these instances — while last year the "indicated" rate dropped to 25 percent, according to the agency data. The agency declined to comment on that change.

DCFS' decisions on indicating cases are separate from the police's process of determining whether a crime occurred, reflecting the agencies' different missions. DCFS aims to protect children, while police are tasked with bringing abuse perpetrators to justice.

Resa said police officials cooperate closely with DCFS investigators and readily share reports and information. But some DCFS child protection investigators told the Tribune they have had trouble getting basic Chicago police reports that help their investigations.

In 2011, then-DCFS Director Richard Calica led an effort to draft a legal agreement between Chicago police and DCFS to speed the sharing of reports and information, but that effort stalled when Calica died in 2013 and then was shelved as eight subsequent directors moved through the troubled child welfare agency.

When DCFS investigators, police detectives and doctors collaborate, "we get confessions," said Dr. Jill Glick, medical director of the University of Chicago Comer Children's Hospital Child Advocacy and Protective Services team, which evaluates and treats some of the young victims brought through the center.

But collaboration is difficult amid high caseloads and staff churn at the center, she said. Glick recalled working with the same seasoned detectives on case after case, but now, "If I have five different kids in the hospital, I have five different police officers and often five different DCFS workers," Glick said. "That makes it very difficult to communicate, coordinate and exchange vital information about these cases."

Chicago Tribune's Dan Hinkel contributed.

Chicago Tribune



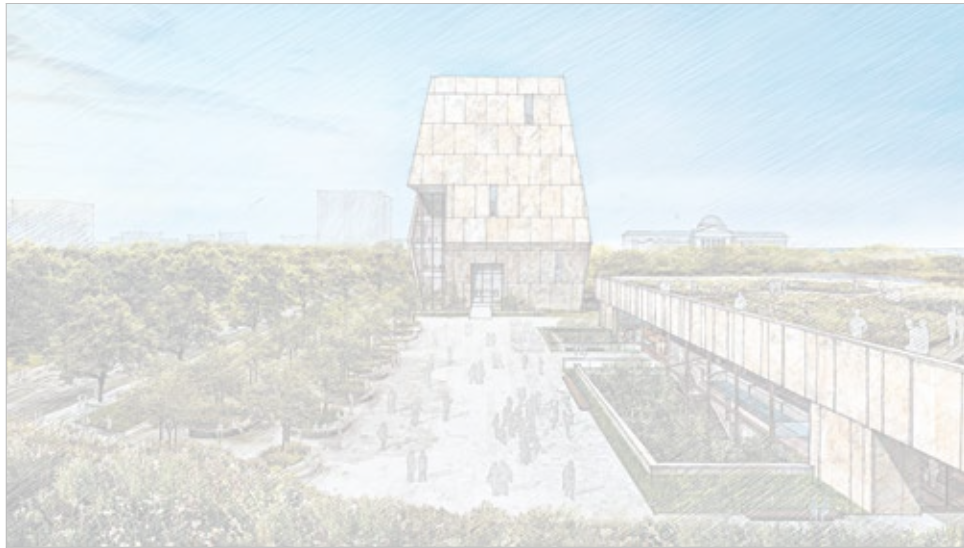
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THURSDAY, MAY 4, 2017

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

“Hopefully it’s a hub where all of us can see a brighter future for the South Side.”

— Former President Barack Obama



OBAMA FOUNDATION

The Obama Presidential Center design, seen from the south, has a plaza that extends into the landscape. The museum, center, anchors the north end of the plaza.

Monument to the future

Take on architecture: Promising, populist, not yet persuasive



BLAIR KAMIN
Cityscapes

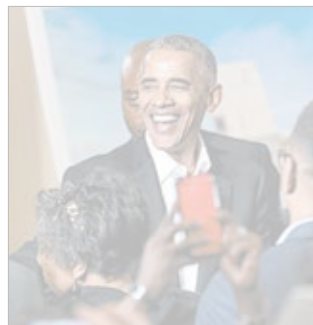
“I wanted to be an architect when I was a kid,” Barack Obama cracked Wednesday as he gave the world a first look at the conceptual plans for his presidential center. “Somehow, I took a wrong turn.”

The former president was in fine form, mixing comedic riffs with a vision of his center that was as populist as it was presidential: a campuslike cluster surrounded by dramatically sculpted parkland and assorted urban delights — a sledding hill, children’s play areas, community gardens, barbecue grills and food trucks serving tacos.

“We will have basketball,” he joked, drawing appreciative laughter from a crowd of about 300 invited guests at the South Shore Cultural Center.

What are we to make of this? My take, which is as preliminary as the plan itself, is that Obama’s team of designers has made a good start on urban planning, but the architecture isn’t yet persuasive. That’s fine because, as Obama said, “This is just the beginning of a process, not the end.”

Led by New York architects Tod Williams and Billie Tsien and Brooklyn-based landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh, the design team has started to strike a compelling balance between Obama’s desire for a strong architectural statement (he reportedly told the architects that one of their early plans was “too quiet”) and the need to respect the historic landscape of Jackson Park, which was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux.



NANCY STONE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Former President Barack Obama greets friends at the South Shore Cultural Center on Wednesday.

The plan wisely pushes its trio of buildings to the park’s far northwest corner, a short walk from the Museum of Science and Industry. That’s smart.

Turn to Kamin, Page 8

Obamas unveil design for ‘transformational’ center in Jackson Park

BY ANGELA CAPUTO, KATHERINE SKIBA AND BLAIR KAMIN
Chicago Tribune

Barack and Michelle Obama on Wednesday offered the first look at the design of the planned Obama Presidential Center in Jackson Park — a campus of three buildings highlighted by an eye-catching museum, whose height and splaying walls would make a bold architectural statement.

Calling it a “transformational project for this community,” the former president said he and Michelle Obama envisioned a vibrant setting that would be akin to Millennium Park — a destination for those drawn to the presidential center and the park itself. But to achieve this, the plans call for closing Cornell Drive, a major access route used by thousands of commuters a day.

“It’s not just a building. It’s not just a park. Hopefully it’s a hub where all of us can see a brighter future for the South Side,” he told an audience of about 300 political and community leaders at the South Shore Cultural Center.

It will also become, the Obama Foundation said, the first completely digital presidential library, with no paper records stored on site.

Turn to Obamas, Page 8

GOP plans House vote on health bill

\$8 billion deal caps push to repeal Obamacare

BY SEAN SULLIVAN, DAVID WEIGEL AND PAIGE WINFIELD CUNNINGHAM
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — House Republican leaders said Wednesday that they plan to bring their plan to revise key parts of the Affordable Care Act to a vote Thursday, capping weeks of fits and starts in their attempt to fulfill a signature campaign promise.

The flagging Republican effort to reshape the nation’s health care system picked up steam Wednesday, as GOP leaders tried to address concerns about people with pre-existing medical conditions.

But independent analysts remained skeptical that the proposal would fully address the needs of at-risk patients who receive coverage guarantees under the Affordable Care Act, underscoring the controversial nature of the GOP effort.

Several lawmakers said they would hold a vote this week only

RETIREMENT PLANS: The Senate votes to stop states from launching IRA-type savings plans for low-income workers. **Page 12**

if they felt certain it could pass — meaning they now believe they have the votes.

House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., guaranteed victory. “Do we have the votes? Yes. Will we pass it? Yes,” he said.

There’s no guarantee that the bill, if passed by the House, will become law. First the Senate must work its will, and the House bill has generated significant opposition in the upper chamber.

If the GOP bill became law, congressional analysts estimate that 24 million more Americans would be uninsured by 2026, including 14 million by next year.

The White House had pushed House leaders to act, and President Donald Trump got heavily involved in recent days, working

Turn to Health bill, Page 13



Exhuming ‘Devil’ from city’s past

The remains of Chicago serial killer H.H. Holmes — whose murder spree was detailed in the best-seller “The Devil in the White City” — are set to be exhumed to try to determine whether the con man faked his execution in 1896.

Chicagoand, Page 4

Comey defends Clinton decision

FBI Director James Comey told a Senate committee that his decision to disclose the preliminary investigation into Clinton’s emails days before the election was a painful experience, but he would do it again.

Nation & World, Page 11

Amid ethics probes, DCFS boss may exit

Florida job beckons as watchdog investigates child welfare director

BY DAVID JACKSON, GARY MARX AND DUAA ELDEIB
Chicago Tribune

George Sheldon boasted a can-do resume when he took the helm of Illinois’ scandal-ridden child welfare agency in 2015 and proposed sweeping reforms.

Two years later, the director of Illinois’ Department of Children and Family Services is the subject of an inspector general’s ethics probe and tangled in allegations that a top Cook County aide misused her authority. His agency also is facing another crisis, roiled by the death of 16-month-old Semaj Crosby in Joliet after DCFS opened and closed four investigations into alleged neglect in her home.

Now Sheldon is contemplating an exit and considering a recruitment effort from Our Kids, a large Florida nonprofit that recently



ZBIGNIEW BZDAK/CHICAGO TRIBUNE
DCFS Director George Sheldon

DCFS SCOLDED: Will County judge wants agency to turn cases over to county in wake of toddler’s death. **Page 6**

lost three of its top administrators following the suicides of youth in the agency’s care.

After the Tribune described findings of its own investigation into DCFS contracts, Sheldon defended his actions but acknowledged that he had belatedly made disclosures about ties to individuals benefiting from those contracts.

The change of leadership
Turn to DCFS, Page 9



Tom Skilling’s forecast High 50 Low 40

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Chicago Tribune

Thursday, May 4, 2017



ZBIGNIEW BZDAK/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTO

DCFS Director George Sheldon was appointed by Gov. Rauner.

Amid ethics probes, DCFS boss may exit

Florida job beckons as watchdog investigates child welfare director

BY DAVID JACKSON, GARY MARX AND DUAA ELDEIB

George Sheldon boasted a can-do resume when he took the helm of Illinois' scandal-ridden child welfare agency in 2015 and proposed sweeping reforms.

Two years later, the director of Illinois' Department of Children and Family Services is the subject of an inspector general's ethics probe and tangled in allegations that a top Cook County aide misused her authority. His agency also is facing another crisis, roiled by the death of 16-month-old Semaj Crosby in Joliet after DCFS opened and closed four investigations into alleged neglect in her home.

Now Sheldon is contemplating an exit and considering a recruitment effort from Our Kids, a large Florida nonprofit that recently lost three of its top administrators following the suicides of youth in the agency's care.

After the Tribune described findings of its own investigation into DCFS contracts, Sheldon defended his actions but acknowledged that he had belatedly made disclosures about ties to individuals benefiting from those contracts.

The change of leadership could be another setback for DCFS, which had seven directors or acting directors in the three years before Gov. Bruce Rauner appointed

Sheldon in February 2015.

“I can’t not give serious consideration to Florida. It’s home, but I also feel an obligation to Illinois,” Sheldon told the Tribune, adding that he expects to make a decision in the coming weeks.

Sheldon’s predecessor resigned after the Tribune’s 2014 “Harsh Treatment” investigation showed juvenile wards were assaulted, raped and lured into prostitution at some of Illinois’ largest residential treatment centers.

Sheldon has blamed the frequent change of leadership for Illinois’ failures to protect young wards or support their families.

Rauner’s office issued a statement that did not address Sheldon’s potential departure but said that the governor requires all state agencies to follow the law and abide by “highest ethical standards. ... We will review the (office of executive inspector general’s) findings and take any and all steps necessary to implement her recommendations.”

Plan for change involved Florida friends, aides

Sheldon, who was managing partner of a Tallahassee lobbying and consultancy firm during the 1980s and 1990s, rose through Democratic Florida politics as a state representative, deputy attorney general and then secretary of the Department of Children and Families from 2008 to 2011.

President Barack Obama appointed him acting assistant secretary for the U.S. Administration for Children and Families. Back in Florida in 2014, Sheldon lost a campaign for attorney general against incumbent Republican Pam Bondi.

Credited with bringing in tens of millions of new federal dollars to Illinois, Sheldon focused on reducing the number of youth in residential treatment centers as well as shortening the length of time wards spend in state custody.

Sheldon’s plan to transform Illinois DCFS centered on cutting-edge technology that would help DCFS identify youth in danger of abuse and neglect, and increase the efficiency of child protection investigators, according to his public statements. To accomplish that, he tapped a circle of Florida friends, former aides and lobbyists, records show.

In recent months, the Tribune has learned, Sheldon fell under a cloud of ethics probes by DCFS Inspector General Denise Kane and Illinois Executive Inspector General Maggie Hickey. Kane and Hickey declined to comment.

The details of those ongoing ethics probes in Illinois are not public. But a separate Tribune examination found Sheldon awarded more than \$1 million in computer contracts that benefited some of those Florida associates.

Sheldon said the contracts were enormously beneficial to the agency and argued that it was smart to tap Florida experts he trusted and admired from previous work.

“I came into a troubled department at best,” Sheldon told the Tribune. “It was apparent to me when I got in here that I needed some people who were knowledgeable and I could trust.”

In a five-page March 27 letter to Rauner, Sheldon in fact expressed frustration with Illinois union contracts that restrict the DCFS director’s ability to make personnel changes, as well as burdensome state procurement rules for contracts. Those are “significant systemic impediments that continue to slow reform,” Sheldon wrote.

In that letter and in his Tribune interview, Sheldon also criticized the inspector general for second-guessing his decisions. “I think you can have only one director at a time,” he told the Tribune.



ZBIGNIEW BZDAK/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTO

George Sheldon's agency is facing a new crisis after the death of 16-month-old Semaj Crosby in Joliet Township after DCFS investigated alleged neglect.

Contracts tied to Sheldon's past

The Tribune examined several contracts and hires by Sheldon and found ties stretching back to his campaigns for Florida office.

Under Sheldon, DCFS gave Florida firm Five Points Technology Group \$811,000 worth of consulting contracts that paid Sheldon's former campaign worker and aide Christopher Pantaleon at least \$30,000 as a subcontractor, state contract records show. Sheldon and Pantaleon had owned two Florida homes together, land records show, and Pantaleon had worked for Sheldon's political campaign and served as his Florida Department of Children and Families spokesman, among other connections, records show.

Sheldon belatedly disclosed the relationship to the state's Conflict of Interest Committee, but still defended the hire. He told the Tribune Wednesday that he regretted not immediately disclosing his ties to Pantaleon.

"To be honest with you, I didn't even think about the fact that Chris and I owned a house together," Sheldon said by telephone. "It just didn't cross my mind."

Pantaleon could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

In another case, Sheldon in September 2015 hired as his driver and confidential personal assistant a 25-year-old Florida man whose driver's license was revoked following Tallahassee arrests for DUI and reckless driving, according to Florida court records and Illinois government reports. In that job, Igor Davidovich Anderson, who had previously worked as a military human resources officer and for a restaurant company, was expected not only to drive Sheldon but also stand in for him at meetings he could not attend.

A subsequent DCFS investigation also determined that Anderson falsely claimed to be working when he drove Sheldon to Saugatuck, Mich., for a vacation. Anderson was fired in February 2016 and forced to repay the state \$1,326 for that holiday and other days when he billed DCFS but the agency found no evidence that he actually worked, records and interviews show.

Sheldon said of the hire: "I have kind of a history of trying to give young people an opportunity."

Anderson did not respond to requests for comment.

Anderson was recommended to Sheldon by Anderson's former boss Adam Corey, a Tallahassee lobbyist who co-owned lounges and had helped Sheldon with his political campaigns, according to interviews and government documents. Corey's Tallahassee Hospitality Group had donated \$1,166 to Sheldon's campaign fund in 2014, and one of Corey's restaurants, Versailles Lounge, hosted a Sheldon fundraiser that year.

In September 2015, six months after Sheldon was appointed DCFS director, Corey registered in Florida as a lobbyist for the computer firm Presidio Networked Solutions. Months later, in June 2016, Illinois gave Presidio two contracts totaling \$1 million to work on DCFS computer systems.

A month later, Presidio boosted its payments to Corey's lobbying firm, from \$20,000 to \$40,000 each half year to \$70,000 to \$90,000, according to Florida disclosure reports that list lobbyist compensation in ranges instead of exact dollar amounts.

Corey said his lobbying had no bearing on Presidio getting the Illinois contract.

"I represent Presidio in Florida, not Chicago. I did not facilitate any introduction that I am aware of between Presidio and George Sheldon," Corey told the Tribune. "I wasn't even aware of the contract until you told me."

Sheldon also said he first learned of the links between Corey and Presidio from the Tribune this week.

"I knew nothing about Presidio, and to this day I've never talked to Adam about it," Sheldon said.

Some of the other contracts Sheldon's DCFS gave to people connected to his past were small.

Tallahassee consultant and journalist Gary Yordon had produced ads for Sheldon's Florida political campaigns. At DCFS, Sheldon gave Yordon's Zachary Group a \$35,000 contract to make two web videos about drowning dangers and safe sleeping practices for infants — even though Illinois' Central Management Services typically creates such public service announcements.

"The PSA was well-received," Yordon told the Tribune. Other contracts were more far-reaching. In Florida, Sheldon worked closely with the Clearwater-based nonprofit called Eckerd Kids, which last year took in \$169 million in government contracts to run child welfare and other programs in that state and others.

In Illinois, DCFS under Sheldon gave Eckerd a \$375,000 contract to help develop a web-based program to pinpoint abuse and neglect investigations with the highest probability of serious injury or death to children.

In contract submissions filed as part of its Illinois DCFS contract, Eckerd touted the "remarkable" accomplishments of its predictive analytics method in Florida's Hillsborough County, where it won a \$65 million annual state contract to oversee child welfare services there in 2012.

But the firm has been embroiled in controversies there, according to published reports. In October, a court-appointed advocate filed a lawsuit alleging that Eckerd and a subcontractor negligently placed a minor brother and sister in the home of an accused sexual predator. Eckerd separately acknowledged last year that 43 children were forced to sleep in offices and other unlicensed locations because Eckerd had run out of foster beds — after initially telling Tallahassee media that 17 youth were sleeping in the offices.

A Tribune analysis of Florida child fatality records identified at least five Hillsborough County children who died while in Eckerd's care in 2015 and 2016. In one case a foster mother now faces first-degree murder and aggravated child abuse charges.

Cook County top aide investigated

One of Sheldon's most important hires from Florida was Jacquetta "Jacqui" Colyer, who ran that state's Miami-Dade and Monroe county child welfare office under Sheldon. She is DCFS Cook County regional administrator under Sheldon in Illinois.

Colyer resigned the Florida post in 2011 after a state panel described management failures at the agency that contributed to the torture and death of 10-year-old ward Nubia Barahona, according to published reports. She had previously worked for the nonprofit Our Kids, the agency Sheldon is considering joining.

In a Tribune interview, Colyer said that she was given an oral reprimand in the Barahona case that was never documented and left the agency on her own accord to pursue other opportunities.

Inspector General Kane recommended in January that Colyer be disciplined "up to and including" firing for alleged incidents of abusing her authority, putting a worker in danger and falsifying information, according to government reports. The inspector general reports did not identify her by name, but the Tribune confirmed Colyer was the subject of the recommended discipline through other public records and interviews.

Colyer denied any wrongdoing and said the inspector general has been "less than fair" with her and other staffers brought up from Florida. Colyer said of the inspector general's report, "The whole thing is not true."

"Most of (Kane's) work is very biased and totally out of context of what I did and why I did it," Colyer said.

Sheldon told the Tribune he supported Colyer in both cases and took no disciplinary action beyond counseling her about boundaries with employees.

Sheldon and other agency officials described Colyer as a committed, no-nonsense manager who has ruffled the feathers of her staff as she pushes to reform what they call an entrenched bureaucracy.

According to the inspector general reports, Colyer allegedly was "continually questioning" veteran supervisor Reginald King about his medical condition after he took time off when he was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer in 2015.

Colyer allegedly contacted King and his family regularly and showed up uninvited at his hospital and even suggested she would wait outside his home, according to the report. King believed she thought he was exaggerating his condition.

"She didn't believe that he was sick," said King's son Tory Scullark to the Tribune. "Within 30 days of his diagnosis, he passed. He was dying and she was harassing him."

Colyer also accused King of failing to report death investigations when in fact she was at fault, the inspector general reported. Colyer "misrepresented" facts and "engaged in offensive and insensitive conduct," the inspector general concluded.

Colyer denied the allegations.

"I showed up to the hospital to take him a card," Colyer told the Tribune. "All I was trying to do was show my concern to one of my fellow employees. Anybody who knows me knows how I care about people."

In the second case, Colyer ignored the recommendations of agency workers when she supported a family's efforts to keep custody of their daughter — despite a record of violence, mental health problems and prior child abuse allegations in the home, according to the inspector general's report and government records.

When a juvenile court judge rejected that proposal, the girl's father made threats to the DCFS supervisor in the case, according to the inspector general's report and other government records.

Marcellus Jones — who records show had a history of severe mental illness and

had convictions for attempted murder, domestic violence and three separate cases of felony aggravated assault — stormed out of the Cook County juvenile courtroom and threatened to kill the investigator's daughter, according to a sheriff's police report and DCFS records (this sentence as published has been corrected in this text). The girl's mother, Demetrius Miller-Jones, jumped out at that supervisor from the bushes outside the court building and cursed at her, the government records show.

Miller-Jones said she and Jones deny all statements in government reports about the family's confrontations with child welfare authorities (this sentence has been added to this text).

The terrified DCFS supervisor asked to be taken off the case, records show.

Before supporting the parents' efforts, Colyer "chose not to read" the voluminous case reports and did not confer with her agency investigators on the case. Instead, "she chose to rely only on the mother's self-reports," many of which were riddled with falsehoods, the inspector general's report said.

Colyer "likely fueled the existing tension between the family and the placement team, and gave the family unrealistic expectations that she, and not the judge, was the arbiter of facts," the inspector general alleged. Colyer "acted with reckless disregard for the safety of her staff and created an unsafe work environment."

Colyer on Wednesday scoffed at the inspector general's criticism, reiterating that she did nothing wrong. Colyer said that the caseworkers spurned her efforts to contact them and rejected her input because "I was an outsider."

Sheldon defended Colyer, telling the Tribune: "Jacqui is aggressive and that's what I was looking for, and she gets involved in individual cases. ... I think she was acting in good faith."

Florida nonprofit: Sheldon 'dream' candidate

At Our Kids, the Florida nonprofit's leaders expressed enthusiasm for Sheldon at a board meeting Wednesday morning, calling him a "dream candidate." The board unanimously gave board chairman Keith Ward the authority to negotiate terms of a contract and the timing with Sheldon.

Ward said he had reached out several times to Sheldon to gauge his interest in becoming that organization's next president and CEO.

"He wants to come home. ... We're very fortunate," Ward told the board. "He's just No. 1 on anybody's list."

While the offer is not a done deal, Ward said, Sheldon planned to meet with him in Florida next week, and the board could approve his hiring by May 15.

State Sen. Julie A. Morrison of Deerfield said DCFS would be hurt by more top management upheaval, which "devastates any possibility of getting this really troubled agency on track."

ACLU of Illinois legal director Ben Wolf said the turmoil could make the director's job hard to fill.

"There are two things that make this a particularly difficult job right now," Wolf added. "The agency's problems are very profound ... and the budget impasse and political paralysis that caused it are putting enormous pressure on the child welfare system and all of the other human services in Illinois."

Chicago Tribune's Monique Garcia contributed from Springfield.



JOHN J. KIM/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

IN CHICAGO SPORTS

'I CAN FEEL THE DECLINE EVERY SINGLE DAY'

Retired sports anchor and former Bears running back Mike Adamle opens up about his cognitive struggles

Mike Adamle and his wife, Kim, talk about life after football and broadcasting.

Chicago Tribune



QUESTIONS? CALL 1-800-TRIBUNE

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2017

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM



ABEL URIBE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE 2012
A lawsuit alleges ex-Officer Joseph Frugoli was protected by a police code of silence.

Judge rebukes city in cop trial

Undisclosed arrest in 1992: 'Nobody messes with the Frugolis!'

By JASON MEISNER
Chicago Tribune

A high-stakes wrongful-death trial alleging a code of silence in the Chicago Police Department took a dramatic turn Tuesday after documents suddenly surfaced midtrial showing an off-duty detective was involved in a drunken bar fight nearly 17 years before he killed two young men in a fiery DUI crash on the Dan Ryan Expressway.

At an emergency hearing outside the presence of the jury, U.S. District Judge Virginia Kendall said the undisclosed report of former homicide Detective Joseph Frugoli's 1992 arrest and five-day suspension went to the heart of the allegations against both Frugoli and the department that officers are inclined to cover up for wrongdoing by fellow cops.

"This is the damning report, and it comes up out of nowhere, six years after the beginning of the lawsuit," an exasperated Kendall said. "It's really a mess."

Plaintiffs' attorneys asked for immediate sanctions, in-

Turn to **Trial**, Page 9

DCFS dumps data software designed to predict abuse

Pushed by previous director, Fla. firms' program proves unreliable, agency says

By DAVID JACKSON AND GARY MARX | Chicago Tribune

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services is ending a high-profile program that used computer data mining to identify children at risk for serious injury or death after the

agency's top official called the technology unreliable.

"We are not doing the predictive analytics because it didn't seem to be predicting much," DCFS Director Beverly "B.J."

Walker told the Tribune.

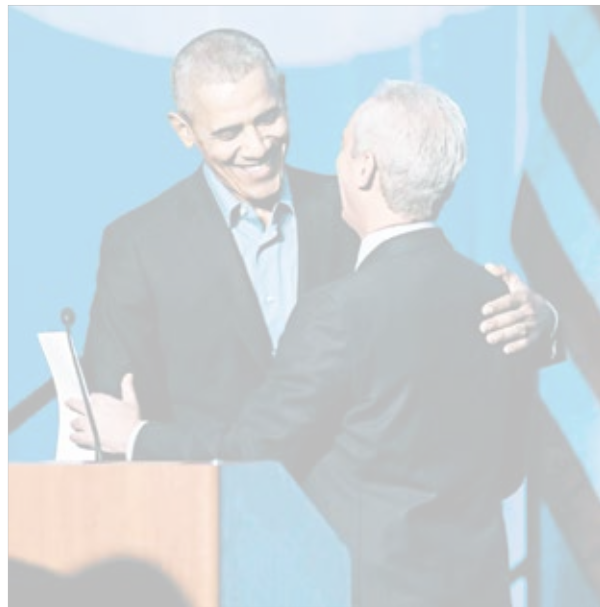
The \$366,000 Rapid Safety Feedback program was central to reforms promised by Walker's predecessor, George Sheldon, who took office in 2015 following a series of child deaths and other problems.

Two Florida firms — the non-profit Eckerd Connects and its for-profit partner, Mindshare Technology — mined electronic

DCFS files and assigned a score of 1 to 100 to children who were the subject of an abuse allegation to the agency hotline. The algorithms rated the children's risk of being killed or severely injured during the next two years, according to DCFS public statements.

But caseworkers were alarmed

Turn to **DCFS**, Page 9



PHIL VELASQUEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Old friends, common cause at climate event

Mayor Rahm Emanuel greets former President Barack Obama at the North American Climate Summit in Chicago on Tuesday. Obama told the summit of mayors that cities and states are now the country's leaders on climate change after the U.S. withdrew from the Paris accord. **Chicagoland**, Page 4

Mideast braces for edict on Jerusalem

Trump said to be set to recognize it as Israeli capital and shift embassy, upend policy

By ALEXANDRA ZAVIS, BRIAN BENNETT AND LAURA KING
Los Angeles Times

BEIRUT — With President Donald Trump poised to do what no other president has been willing to do — move the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem — leaders and analysts in the region warned Tuesday that it could spur insecurity and instability in a part of the world already beset by both.

Fulfilling an oft-repeated campaign pledge, Trump will declare Jerusalem the capital of Israel in a speech at the White House on Wednesday, three senior administration officials said. At the same time, he will set in motion a multiyear process for moving the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the officials said.

The president laid the groundwork in a series of phone calls Tuesday to Saudi Arabia's King Salman, Jordan's

Turn to **Jerusalem**, Page 13

Buffalo Grove students mourn through music

School hits healing note with tribute to 3 teachers

By VIKKI ORTIZ HEALY
Chicago Tribune

When Emily Bondarenko first played through her piano part in her high school chamber orchestra's newest piece, the jagged melody and chaotic measures did not seem to go together at all.

"It made no sense whatsoever," said Bondarenko, a junior at Buffalo Grove High School who landed the coveted seat in the orchestra after a decade of piano lessons and persistent practice. "It sounded like the ugliest piece

in the world."

But a few days later, when Bondarenko joined the full chamber orchestra for its first rehearsal of the piece called "Solaces," the seemingly disconnected parts masterfully blended into a moving, turbulent composition. The piece came together just as it was intended by its composer, who wrote it to help the school's students and staff memorialize and mourn three teachers they had lost.

Turn to **Tribute**, Page 6



KAMIL KRZACZYNSKI/FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Buffalo Grove High School students rehearse "Solaces," composed to help the community grieve the loss of three teachers last school year.

Justices skeptical of cake as speech

The Supreme Court heard arguments from a baker that his work be considered speech in a case with major ramifications for discrimination. **Nation & World**, Page 15

Russia banned from '18 Winter Olympics

Officials say the Russian government supported widespread doping among the country's athletes. **Chicago Sports**



Tom Skilling's forecast High 32 Low 20

Chicago Weather Center: Complete forecast on back of A+E

\$1.99 city and suburbs, \$2.50 elsewhere 170th year No. 340 © Chicago Tribune



Supercharging white blood cells to
ATTACK CANCER

The first in the nation to offer both FDA approved CAR T-cell therapies.



AT THE FOREFRONT
**UChicago
Medicine**

Learn more about this worldwide breakthrough for leukemia and lymphoma at UChicagoMedicine.org/DefeatCancer

Chicago Tribune

Wednesday, December 6, 2017

DCFS dumps data software designed to predict abuse

Pushed by previous director, Fla. firms' program proves unreliable, agency says

BY DAVID JACKSON AND GARY MARX

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services is ending a high-profile program that used computer data mining to identify children at risk for serious injury or death after the agency's top official called the technology unreliable.

"We are not doing the predictive analytics because it didn't seem to be predicting much," DCFS Director Beverly "B.J." Walker told the Tribune.

The \$366,000 Rapid Safety Feedback program was central to reforms promised by Walker's predecessor, George Sheldon, who took office in 2015 following a series of child deaths and other problems.

Two Florida firms — the nonprofit Eckerd Connects and its for-profit partner, Mindshare Technology — mined electronic DCFS files and assigned a score of 1 to 100 to children who were the subject of an abuse allegation to the agency hotline. The algorithms rated the children's risk of being killed or severely injured during the next two years, according to DCFS public statements.

But caseworkers were alarmed and overwhelmed by alerts as thousands of children were rated as needing urgent protection. More than 4,100 Illinois children were assigned a 90 percent or greater probability of death or injury, according to internal DCFS child-tracking data released to the Tribune under state public records laws.

And 369 youngsters, all under age 9, got a 100 percent chance of death or serious injury in the next two years, the Tribune found.

At the same time, high-profile child deaths kept cropping up with little warning from the predictive analytics software, DCFS officials told the Tribune.

One child who did not get a high-risk score was 17-month-old Semaj Crosby, who was found dead under a couch in her Joliet Township home in April following at least 10 DCFS abuse investigations and an ongoing "intact family" care plan.

Another child the computers failed to flag was 22-month-old Itachi Boyle, who died a month after Semaj in Rock Island following eight DCFS mistreatment investigations into his home and similar "intact family" services from a nonprofit contracted by DCFS, the Tribune found.

"Predictive analytics (wasn't) predicting any of the bad cases," Walker told the Tribune. "I've decided not to proceed with that contract."

A May 2017 Tribune investigation found the arrangement with Eckerd was among a series of no-bid deals Sheldon gave to a circle of associates from his previous work in Florida as a child welfare official, lawyer and lobbyist. Sheldon left Illinois under a cloud a month later, and a July joint report by the Office of Execu-

tive Inspector General and the DCFS inspector general concluded that Sheldon and DCFS committed mismanagement by classifying the Eckerd/Mindshare arrangement as a grant, instead of as a no-bid contract.

By doing so, the joint report said, DCFS avoided state bidding transparency requirements, making it impossible to determine if Illinois could have obtained the same services from local companies at a lower cost, a requirement of the state's procurement code.

Predictive analytics has captured the imaginations of human services administrators around the globe and tapped an estimated \$270 million state and federal government market for child welfare data collection and analysis. If it is possible to use big data to spotlight a child in trouble and intervene before he or she is hurt, then doing so is government's moral obligation, advocates for the technology say.

Eckerd Connects — which recently changed its name from Eckerd Kids — told the Tribune that variants of its Rapid Safety Feedback are used today by child welfare agencies in Ohio, Indiana, Maine, Louisiana, Tennessee, Connecticut and Oklahoma.

But some large child welfare agencies have balked at the expense and ethical questions about predicting children's futures based on the histories of their families. The algorithms could disproportionately select poor children of color for government intervention, critics warn, and automated decision-making may replace the judgment of experienced child welfare professionals.

The effort in Illinois unraveled following missteps acknowledged by both DCFS and Eckerd, Tribune interviews show.

The DCFS automated case-tracking system was riddled with data entry errors in both the Semaj Crosby and Itachi Boyle cases, the Tribune found. In addition, it did not link investigations about many children to cases regarding their siblings, or other adults in the same home.

These and other shortfalls undermined Eckerd's analysis. And state laws forced DCFS to erase "unfounded" child mistreatment investigations, giving the Eckerd analysts less data to work with.

The department is now moving to change the way it indexes and links investigations, and it is also considering legislative changes that would allow it to retain records of past unproven allegations.

For its part, Eckerd told the Tribune it regrets using stark language suggesting the company could predict the probability of harm to a child.

Illinois child care agencies told the Tribune they were alarmed by computer-generated alerts like the one that said: "Please note that the two youngest children, ages 1 year and 4 years have been assigned a 99% probability by the Eckerd Rapid Safety Feedback metrics of serious harm or death in the next two years."

"We all agree that we could have done a better job with that language. I admit it is confusing," said Eckerd spokesman Douglas Tobin.

Eckerd now says the 1-to-100 score is merely meant to represent how closely a child matches historical data on fatality and harm cases.

After the Tribune raised questions about the language Eckerd and Mindshare were using, Eckerd asked DCFS to strike that language from internal communications to child workers. "We are working to change that language," Tobin said.

DCFS used similar language about predicting harm or death in public budget statements as well as in federal court filings for the consent decree where the agency describes its programs and reform efforts.

While Eckerd says details of its risk-assignment algorithms are considered proprietary, the basics of its Rapid Safety Feedback are outlined in state procurement files, federal court reports and marketing presentations from Illinois and other

states.

Eckerd retrospectively analyzes thousands of closed abuse cases and from them draws data points that are highly correlated with serious harm. The parents' ages could be a factor — or their previous criminal records, evidence of substance abuse in the home or the presence of a new boyfriend or girlfriend.

DCFS gives Eckerd a nightly “data dump” from the state’s automated case-tracking system, and the next morning Eckerd generates real-time scores flagging the most imperiled children.

Front-line caseworkers should never get those raw scores, let alone make decisions based on them, Eckerd says; the data instead should be reviewed by DCFS supervisors who are trained and coached by Eckerd to decide which cases need immediate attention and how to tackle them.

Even before arriving in Illinois, Sheldon had professional ties to both Eckerd and Mindshare.

He is quoted on Mindshare’s website endorsing that company and its technology. And as head of Florida’s child welfare agency, he worked closely with Eckerd, which runs child welfare programs in Florida’s Hillsborough County under a \$73 million state contract, using for-profit companies as subcontractors.

When Sheldon arrived in Illinois in 2015, he appointed Eckerd’s Chief External Relations Officer Jody Grutza to a \$125,000 senior DCFS position.

While Grutza did not supervise the Eckerd contract, Sheldon put her in charge of overseeing other deals with Sheldon’s Florida associates, including a Five Points Technology contract that paid \$262,000 to Christopher Pantaleon, a longtime Sheldon aide with whom Sheldon owned Florida property, the Tribune revealed in a July report.

After a year in Illinois, Grutza returned to a top position with Eckerd in Florida.

In a brief interview, Sheldon said it was smart to tap Florida experts he trusted from previous work as he hit the ground running in Illinois, and that the Eckerd/Mindshare partnership had a good national reputation well beyond Florida.

In contract papers submitted to Illinois DCFS, Eckerd described the “remarkable” accomplishments of its predictive analytics method, saying Eckerd had virtually eliminated abuse-related deaths of wards in Hillsborough County since 2012.

But the Tribune’s report in May report found at least five Hillsborough County children who died while under Eckerd’s supervision in 2015 and 2016, including one whose foster mother faces pending first-degree murder and aggravated child abuse charges.

Eckerd said four of those five fatalities were accidental deaths related to unsafe sleep or natural causes, and the alleged homicide involved a child in foster care who had not received a Rapid Safety Feedback assessment.

Despite her decision to end the predictive analysis program, Walker told the Tribune that Eckerd did provide useful case-analysis training that is currently being used by 15 agency staffers and three supervisors.

This team is reviewing the roughly 2,700 cases of families receiving “intact family services” and prioritizing them to identify the highest-risk cases, Walker told the Tribune.

This review is “going to take several months” but “it’s going to teach us a lot,” Walker said.

Walker said she also is working to reduce the caseloads of investigators while improving communication between state investigators and the nonprofit organizations that deliver the “intact” services to troubled families.

Chicago Tribune



QUESTIONS? CALL 1-800-TRIBUNE

TUESDAY, MAY 16, 2017

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM



JOSE M. OSORIO/TRIBUNE

Tribune owner Tronc plans to buy the Chicago Sun-Times and continue publishing the newspaper.

Tribune owner pursues Sun-Times

Tentative sale calls for 2 papers to keep publishing

By RICK KOGAN
Chicago Tribune

In the long and raucous, altogether lively if recently beleaguered history of Chicago newspapers, Monday will rank as a "stop-the-presses" day after it was announced that, in short headline style: "Chicago Tribune Seeks To Buy Chicago Sun-Times."

Tronc, the parent company of the Tribune, has entered into a nonbinding letter of intent to acquire Wrapparts Holdings, which owns the Sun-Times as well as other assets such as the Chicago Reader alternative weekly, the Aggrego digital content business and the syndicated column The Straight Dope.

The announcement follows months of discussions between Wrapparts and Tronc and after both organizations worked closely with the Department of Justice's antitrust division.

The tentative deal means Chicago would remain one of the last two newspaper cities in the country, though those papers would operate under a single corporate owner. Terms of the potential deal were not disclosed.

"There are minor points still to be worked out, but we are confident that we will be able to move forward on this transaction and reach a definitive agreement," said Tronc CEO Justin Dearborn. "This is generally viewed as good for all Tronc shareholders."

Dearborn also said the deal would help the Sun-Times "maintain its independent voice."

In a city where one could once buy as many as

Turn to Sun-Times, Page 5

Leadoff hitter a test Schwarber didn't pass

Kyle Schwarber, the Cub Chicago built up to Ruthian proportions, is hitting a Mendoza-like .179 for a team struggling to score. **Chicago Sports**



CHRIS SWEDA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

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©Chicago Tribune



Trump said to have shared intel

Administration denies classified info on ISIS given to Russians

By GREG MILLER AND GREG JAFFE
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump revealed classified information to the Russian foreign minister and ambassador in a White House meeting last week, according to current and former U.S. officials, who said Trump's disclosures jeopardized a critical source of intelligence on the Islamic State.

The information Trump relayed had been provided

by a U.S. partner through an intelligence-sharing arrangement considered so sensitive that details have been withheld from allies and tightly restricted even within the U.S. government, officials said.

The partner had not given the United States permission to share the material with Russia, and officials said that Trump's decision to do so risks cooperation from an ally that has access to the inner workings of the Islamic State, also called ISIS.

After Trump's meeting,



EVAN VUCCI/AP

President Trump, seen Monday with VP Mike Pence, recently hosted two Russian officials at the White House.

senior White House officials took steps to contain the damage, placing calls to the CIA and National Security Agency.

"This is code-word in-

formation," said a U.S. official familiar with the matter, using terminology that refers to one of the highest classification levels used by American spy agencies. Trump "revealed more information to the Russian ambassador than we have shared with our own allies."

The revelation comes as Trump faces rising legal and political pressure on multiple Russia-related fronts. Last week, he fired FBI Director James Comey in the midst of a bureau investigation into links between the Trump campaign and Moscow.

Turn to Trump, Page 9



PHIL VELASQUEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

SUMMERY STEP DANCE

The lunchtime crowd perches and strolls along the city's riverwalk Monday, a sunny start to the week. Chicago might hit 90 degrees for the first time this year on Tuesday. Tom Skilling's complete forecast on the back of A+E



Tuesday
High 90
Low 68



Wednesday
High 87
Low 68



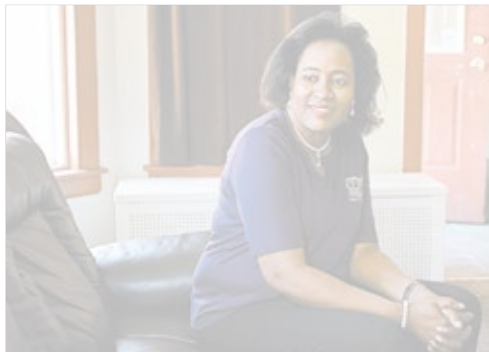
Thursday
High 81
Low 48



Friday
High 59
Low 47



Saturday
High 74
Low 52



PHIL VELASQUEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Illa Doss, 55, lives in Chicago's Galewood neighborhood on the Northwest Side. She moved from the West Side's Austin neighborhood because of the fear of crime.

Living in segregated areas may affect health, study finds

Data collected on blood pressure, neighborhoods

By KATE THAYER
Chicago Tribune

Where you live — even down to the specific neighborhood — might have an impact on your blood pressure, a new study led by a Northwestern University researcher suggests.

The study authors looked at data from 2,280

African-Americans whose health has been tracked for decades and discovered what they called a "powerful effect": Those who moved out of highly segregated neighborhoods saw a drop in their blood pressure.

The correlation between less segregated areas and lower blood pressure is likely related to less stress and better access to exercise, medical care and healthier food, researchers say.

The paper, published

Monday in JAMA Internal Medicine, is based on data from black participants in the Coronary Artery Risk Development in Young Adults study, or CARDIA, which was launched in the 1980s and ever since has tracked the health of several thousands participants in Chicago, Minneapolis, Oakland, Calif., and Birmingham, Ala.

Kiarri Kershaw, assistant professor of preven-

Turn to Study, Page 5

TRIBUNE WATCHDOG UPDATE

Lawmakers to grill DCFS on kids' deaths

Speedup in pace of resolving abuse cases questioned

By DAVID JACKSON, GARY MARK AND DUAA ELDEIB
Chicago Tribune

Some Illinois lawmakers are demanding answers from the Department of Children and Family Services about recent child abuse deaths and new policies that push investigators to speed up abuse and neglect investigations.

"What happened in these cases?" asked state Sen. Julie Morrison, D-Deerfield, who will be participating in a joint House-Senate hearing on DCFS scheduled for May 26 in Springfield. "I'm going to focus on any

cases that were closed early, any and all."

Morrison and state Rep. Mary Flowers, D-Chicago, said they plan to question DCFS officials following a May 11 Tribune report on three Cook County cases in which children died of beatings or starvation shortly after the agency closed investigations into mistreatment in their homes.

"You are leaving children in harm's way," Flowers said in an interview.

DCFS and Director George Sheldon did not immediately respond to requests by the Tribune for comment. Sheldon is considering a job offer from a Miami nonprofit as he faces Illinois ethics probes into DCFS con-

Turn to DCFS, Page 5

High court shuts door on N.C. law

Justices leave in place a ruling by the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals striking down the law's photo ID requirement to vote in person, which the court said targeted African-Americans. **Nation & World, Page 7**

Chicago Tribune

Tuesday, May 16, 2017

TRIBUNE WATCHDOG UPDATE

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BY DAVID JACKSON, GARY MARX AND DUAA ELDEIB

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“You are leaving children in harm’s way,” Flowers said in an interview.

DCFS and Director George Sheldon did not immediately respond to requests by the Tribune for comment. Sheldon is considering a job offer from a Miami nonprofit as he faces Illinois ethics probes into DCFS contracts that benefited his friends and political associates. Sheldon said he will make his decision about whether to stay with the agency this week.

Flowers said she also was troubled by the Tribune’s account of a new DCFS program called Blue Star that offers overtime pay to Cook County investigators who significantly boost the percentage of cases they close within 14 days.

“There is an incentive to do harm, and that is unacceptable,” Flowers said. “I need to know what happened to those Blue Star kids. What else is out there that we can prevent from happening?”

DCFS denied offering financial rewards to investigators who quickly closed investigations, but agency officials said they now are reviewing how Blue Star was communicated to workers and whether the case-closing goals are appropriate.

Sheldon has told the Tribune the goal of Blue Star was to help investigators focus on the most serious allegations of harm.

The acceleration of case closings -- and a drop in the percentage of investigations where abuse was found -- started in Cook County last year after three child fatalities. The newspaper found shortcuts and failures in those investigations, including times when DCFS did not interview key witnesses or gather other evidence.

In one case, a DCFS investigator reported that he saw 6-month-old Jazmine Walker in May 2016 and found her “free of any salient signs of abuse or neglect.”

Eight days later, the infant was dead of starvation, weighing less than 5 pounds

with bones protruding visibly beneath her skin. In response to Tribune questions, DCFS has asked agency Inspector General Denise Kane to probe whether the agency investigator actually saw the girl or fabricated his account.

In the second case, 4-year-old Manuel Aguilar was pronounced dead in August 2016 after DCFS closed three separate investigations into mistreatment in his Southwest Side home. DCFS did not interview or even acknowledge the presence of a violent, gang-involved man who lived there, and failed to follow up when Manny's siblings told a caseworker about beatings and lack of food, the Tribune found.

The third case fell through the cracks because of poor communication between the agency investigator and a private contractor, a subsequent DCFS Quality Assurance Review found.

Two-year-old Elliana Claiborne died in Nov. 2015 when her mother allegedly punched her in the stomach; DCFS had closed a prior abuse investigation without proper followup, government records show.

In Tribune interviews, DCFS officials acknowledged mistakes in the handling of all three cases.



Ambush in Egypt kills 28 Christians

Gunmen open fire on bus carrying Copts to monastery

By HAMZA HENDAWI AND MOHAMMED WAGDY
Associated Press

CAIRO — Masked gunmen ambushed a bus carrying Coptic Christians to a monastery south of Cairo on Friday, killing at least 28 people, and Egypt responded by launching airstrikes against what it said were militant training bases in Libya.

President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi announced the retaliatory action hours after the bus was riddled with machine-gun fire on a remote desert road by suspected Islamic State militants riding in three SUVs.

"What you've seen today will not go unpunished. An extremely painful strike has been dealt to the bases. Egypt will never hesitate to strike terror bases anywhere," el-Sissi said in a televised address to the nation.

Senior Egyptian officials said fighter jets targeted bases in eastern Libya of the Shura Council, an Islamist militia known to be linked to al-Qaida, not the Islamic State. There was no word on damage or casualties.

El-Sissi also appealed to President Donald Trump to lead the global war against terror.

Trump, attending the G-7 summit in Italy, blamed the bloodshed on a "thuggish ideology" and said it should bring nations together to crush "evil organizations of terror."

Turn to *Ambush*, Page 2

Kushner sought back channel with Russia

Russian envoy Sergey Kislyak reported to his superiors in December that Jared Kushner, President Trump's son-in-law and top aide, asked about setting up a communications channel between the transition team and the Kremlin.

Nation & World, Page 5

DCFS: Litany of failures in Joliet toddler's death

Despite multiple allegations of abuse, no plan to protect kids

By DAVID JACKSON, GARY MARK AND DUAA ELDEIB
Chicago Tribune

A new report describes a litany of failures by state child welfare investigators who opened at least 10 investigations into abuse and neglect in the home of 17-month-old Semaj Crosby before her death in April.

As investigators for the Department of Children and Family Services walked through the filthy, bug-infested house in Joliet Township month after month, they failed to learn the names or identities of many of the adults caring for children there, according to the 22-page DCFS report.

Tipsters reported open drug-dealing and violence in the home, but agency investigators closed cases when residents assured them the kids were safe and closely supervised, the report said.

Several of the adults in the home had allegedly abused youth numerous times, but DCFS put in

place no safety plans to protect the children in their care — even as new allegations arose that children were molested, mis-



FAMILY PHOTO
The body of 17-month-old Semaj Crosby was found inside her home in April.

treated and left in squalor. The report was completed by a psychologist and a social worker through the DCFS Office of Quality Enhancement. It was released late Friday afternoon.

"I think it lays out real failures in connecting the dots," DCFS Director George Sheldon told the Tribune. "We've got to tie these cases together."

Also Friday, Will County sheriff's investigators said they have identified four "persons of interest" in Semaj's death, including her mother, Sheri Gordon; Semaj's aunt, Lakerisha Crosby; and her grandmother, Darlene Crosby, Lt. Dan Jungles said.

A fourth person, a minor child who was at the home, also has been identified as a person of interest, Jungles said.

"All have attorneys and are not speaking with us," Jungles said.

However, attorneys for the three adults told the Tribune that their clients are working with authorities.

Cosmo Tedone, who represents the Crosbys, said in a text message to a reporter that they spent "days with the police cooperating in full" after

Turn to *DCFS*, Page 4

SUN, SAND, THEN STORMS



ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

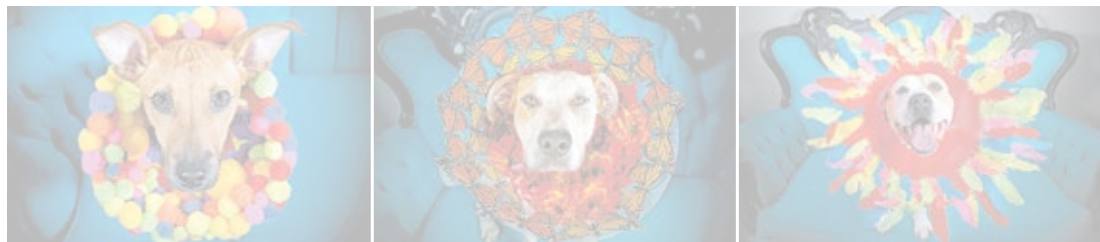
Lenne de Boer and son Morris, 2, play in the sand at Ohio Street Beach as Chicago's beach season opened Friday. However, the holiday weekend may not be ideal for beachgoing as partly to mostly sunny skies on Saturday will give way to scattered showers and storms throughout Sunday and Monday. Tom Skilling's weather on the back of *Chicago Sports*

Saturday
High 76
Low 58

Sunday
High 73
Low 54

Monday
High 72
Low 53

Tuesday
High 68
Low 51



ERIN EINBENDER PHOTOS

Ellie, from left, Buddie and Miguel bear "cones of fame" conceived by then-art student Erin Einbender, a Chicago animal rescue volunteer. All three have since been adopted.

'Cones of fame' unleash rescue dogs' potential

Art student's photos of accessorized pooches go viral, help get them permanent homes

By LEONOR VIVANCO | Chicago Tribune

Erin Einbender spent \$200 at a craft store buying colorful feathers, fuzzy pom-pom balls and other supplies for her final photography project as a student at the School of the Art Institute.

Her idea was to turn those "cones of shame" — the clunky plastic cones dogs sometimes have to wear around their necks to keep them from licking or biting themselves after surgeries — into decorative "cones of fame."

"All the dogs at One Tail at a Time, before they get adopted, get spayed or neutered and they looked so sad in their cones," said the

30-year-old Printers Row resident, who has volunteered at the local animal rescue group since October.

"I wanted to empower the dogs and help them get adopted because I know that good photographs help them get noticed," she said. "I also wanted to show the importance of spaying and neutering pets because people associate the cones with shame and it's actually really important to spay and neuter your pet."

Spaying and neutering programs are aimed at curtailing

the overpopulation of animals so fewer end up homeless in shelters. The more dogs that animal groups can get adopted, the more dogs they can rescue from the city's Animal Care and Control shelter, she said.

Einbender spent a few hours last month making 20 festive cones and gluing on butterflies, flowers and gems with the help of a handful of other volunteers. This month she did a photo shoot with four adoptable dogs looking for forever homes and posted her images on social media. They have gone viral

after being featured on such sites as BuzzFeed, Mashable and People.com.

Snowflake and Ellie, accessorized with pom-poms, and Miguel, adorned with a ring of feathers, all got adopted. So did Buddie, whose cone was dressed up with flowers and butterflies.

"I really did see a change in personality in the dogs. They looked so sad in the (plain) cones and when I put them in front of the camera with these

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DCFS: Litany of failures in Joliet toddler's death

Despite multiple allegations of abuse, no plan to protect kids

BY DAVID JACKSON, GARY MARX AND DUAA ELDEIB

A new report describes a litany of failures by state child welfare investigators who opened at least 10 investigations into abuse and neglect in the home of 17-month-old Semaj Crosby before her death in April.

As investigators for the Department of Children and Family Services walked through the filthy, bug-infested house in Joliet Township month after month, they failed to learn the names or identities of many of the adults caring for children there, according to the 22-page DCFS report.

Tipsters reported open drug-dealing and violence in the home, but agency investigators closed cases when residents assured them the kids were safe and closely supervised, the report said.

Several of the adults in the home had allegedly abused youth numerous times, but DCFS put in place no safety plans to protect the children in their care — even as new allegations arose that children were molested, mistreated and left in squalor.

The report was completed by a psychologist and a social worker through the DCFS Office of Quality Enhancement. It was released late Friday afternoon.

“I think it lays out real failures in connecting the dots,” DCFS Director George Sheldon told the Tribune. “We’ve got to tie these cases together.”

Also Friday, Will County sheriff’s investigators said they have identified four “persons of interest” in Semaj’s death, including her mother, Sheri Gordon; Semaj’s aunt, Lakerisha Crosby; and her grandmother, Darlene Crosby, Lt. Dan Jungles said.

A fourth person, a minor child who was at the home, also has been identified as a person of interest, Jungles said.

“All have attorneys and are not speaking with us,” Jungles said.

However, attorneys for the three adults told the Tribune that their clients are working with authorities.

Cosmo Tedone, who represents the Crosbys, said in a text message to a reporter that they spent “days with the police cooperating in full” after Semaj’s death and have not been asked to come in for additional interviews.

Gordon’s lawyer, Neil Patel, said: “We continue to work with the sheriff in any way that we can.”

The DCFS report describes previous abuse and neglect allegations made against several people, including Semaj’s father, James Crosby.

Crosby was “indicated” for hitting his then 5-year-old son with a belt “after he had gotten in trouble at school,” the report said. The beating left his son with bruises and other injuries.

DCFS also has an unresolved investigation into Lakerisha Crosby and Wesley

Sykes Jr., Lakerisha's former boyfriend, the report said.

That investigation involves a 1-year-old boy who stayed at the Joliet house in February and was returned to the mother several days later with bruises on his right leg, according to the report.

Despite the multiple allegations of abuse and neglect in the home going back to April 2015, the report provides no indication that DCFS implemented a safety plan to protect Semaj, her siblings or other children in the home from further harm. DCFS deemed most of the investigations "unfounded due to insufficient evidence," according to the report.

DCFS also received an anonymous tip in May 2016 that there were roughly 30 people living in the home. The "occupants openly sell drugs and they drink on the children's playground that is by their house," the tipster reported.

According to the tipster, the children were "sent to the playground to play all times of day and night."

DCFS visited the home later that year following allegations that at least 15 children were in the home, and that a 1-year-old child wearing only a diaper was outside in traffic, according to the report.

In January, Semaj's 7-year-old brother reported feeling unsafe after he alleged his mother hit him in the head with a shoe repeatedly, but he denied that statement when the caseworker interviewed him. Two months later, DCFS investigated the suspected sexual abuse of a 3-year-old in the home but the allegation also was deemed to be unfounded.

DCFS and other authorities later found the home overrun with trash and infested by roaches. Residents were sleeping on broken beds and the floor. Clothes were strewn everywhere, the report said.

Semaj's death prompted the 11th investigation involving that Joliet Township address.

Days after Semaj was found dead under a couch, the house was condemned by authorities — and then burned to the ground in a suspected arson.

The report comes as Sheldon is deciding whether to leave the agency to become head of Our Kids, a large Florida nonprofit.

Sheldon, who said he will make his decision by the end of the month, has faced intense criticism about the recent deaths of youths who had been the subject of DCFS investigations as well as the agency's failure to protect vulnerable children and their families.

In addition to headlines about child deaths, Sheldon is facing state ethics probes into DCFS contracts that benefited his friends and political associates in Florida, the Tribune has revealed.

Freelancer Alicia Fabbre contributed.