

State of New Mexico

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Children, Youth and Families Department outlines current, future initiatives to improve wellbeing of New Mexico children

Agency taking multiple steps to address challenges outlined in Collaborative Safety Report

The New Mexico Children, Youth & Families Department announced today multiple initiatives to improve the child welfare system and safeguard children. The actions align with recommendations made in a report commissioned by Cabinet Secretary Barbara J. Vigil. The agency released the report by [Collaborative Safety LLC](#), a national firm that has evaluated other state child welfare agencies, today.

“The work of CYFD touches 20,000 New Mexico families every year. Our staff are passionate about the work they do, and when I took on leadership of this agency, I immediately wanted to identify and implement ways to improve the system for the children and families we interact with every day,” said Secretary Vigil. “This report highlights many of the challenges we are already addressing and further illuminates opportunities for improvement – and how we tackle them.”

These ongoing and immediate steps include:

- An overhaul of the Department’s training protocols. Since January 2022, we have been fully retraining our front-line investigators and other workers. As of today, 244 investigators and other workers have been retrained on safety-organized practice, which emphasizes strong relationships between case workers and families. Starting this month and through September, all front-line investigators and supervisors will receive specialized training unique to their role in the agency.
- Creating new critical incident teams to review serious injuries, including child deaths. This new and more robust review process will better encompass each aspect of critical incidents. As part of this process, the team may interview families, law enforcement, physicians, other

staff and others to fully understand how the system worked or didn't work – and how it can be improved to prevent similar incidents in the future. The new model will also give staff an opportunity to share their experiences and expertise to shape the recommendations of the critical incident teams.

- Joining the [National Partnership for Child Safety](#). New Mexico is now a part of the National Partnership for Child Safety, a collaborative of 31 U.S. jurisdictions—including states, counties, and tribes — that joined last year to formulate effective child fatality prevention strategies using safety science and first-of-its-kind data sharing. It was formed to advance some of the key recommendations and findings of the federal [Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities](#). The Partnership is supported by Casey Family Programs. The Partnership is also assisting CYFD in setting up the critical incident team structure.
- Creating statewide uniformity in applying CYFD's structured decision-making tools. Structured decision-making tools guide investigators in assessing children's safety and overall probability of risk. CYFD is taking action to make sure that every member of staff uniformly knows how to use the tool, including through enhanced training to investigators and supervisors statewide.

After taking on the role of Cabinet Secretary, Vigil invited Collaborative Safety to conduct a clear and accurate assessment of CYFD to improve outcomes for New Mexico children. The report applies safety science, the discipline that has reshaped industries such as aviation, nuclear power, and health care. These industries, like child welfare systems, have extremely high risks associated with their work. The safety science approach ensures that workers are held accountable, but also that the system is providing them with the tools and support they need to be successful – to keep kids safe.

“In order to improve CYFD, we needed an objective assessment -- one based upon systemic improvement, not individual blame,” said Secretary Vigil. “This is one important step forward for New Mexico's child welfare system, but it is not the last. I will not stop looking at every angle, deploying every resource, to make our system work for children and families.”

The Collaborative Safety report also calls for the creation of an internal safety culture that encourages employees to speak up when they see issues and to feel empowered to suggest new ways of working.

A copy of the report is available for download: [Collaborative Safety Review](#)

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