

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/pattern-disturbing-failures-found-colorados-child-welfare-system/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

An investigation of Colorado's Department of Human Services (DHS) by the Denver Post and 9News says the state's child welfare system has repeatedly failed to protect abused children brought to its attention. More than 40 percent of the Colorado children who died of abuse and neglect in the last six years had a history with DHS, according to the investigation. [The Denver Post](#) has more on what it calls a pattern of disturbing failures:

Caseworkers and their supervisors failed to complete investigations in the time required by law 18 times before children ended up dead. They routinely at least 31 times did not contact neighbors and acquaintances who might have told them a child was at risk of harm or even death. More than half of the time, caseworkers violated at least one state rule when conducting abuse investigations, according to an analysis of fatality case reviews by the state Department of Human Services.

Almost half of the children known to social services who died of abuse and neglect since 2007 had at least one call screened out, or not investigated, because child welfare workers deemed the allegations did not meet the threshold for child abuse or they didn't have enough information.

Despite high-profile child deaths, warnings from panels and expressions of concern from elected officials, the state's \$375 million system has seen the number of children dying of abuse and neglect rise over the past five years. This trend has local experts wondering what is keeping the state from fixing this issue:

It's 2012, and all the advancements we have in our society, whether its technological or medical, we can't figure out how to keep kids safe? said Stephanie Villafuerte, director of the Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center, a nonprofit law firm that often represents foster children. You are talking about dead children.

One issue past Governors and legislators have highlighted is the fact that Colorado's child welfare system is made up of county-level departments that operate without state oversight on policies such as maximum staff caseloads and worker pay. The lack of state supervision, as well as documented instances of failures to follow state policies, was highlighted in The Post's review:

In more than half of child abuse deaths in the last six years, caseworkers did not follow state policy regarding how to investigate neglect and abuse allegations, according to The Post's review of state fatality reports. Of 59 reports released to the newspaper, 31 listed violations of state rules.

Caseworkers erred by screening out calls that deserved follow-up, failing to check on children within the time allowed by law and neglecting to communicate with law officers or another county's child welfare division when a child moved, according to state reviews of the deaths.

In 2012 alone, nine kids with prior state DHS contact have died. On average, a child dies of abuse or neglect every 30 days in Colorado. This growing problem has many concerned, but Reggie Bicha, who was named DHS director in January, says he's determined to improve what some have called a broken system:

We are trying to shift a huge ocean liner in our child welfare culture in Colorado, Bicha said. I want us to turn the boat in a better direction for kids and families.

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