



the independent voice for Kentucky's children

KENTUCKY YOUTH ADVOCATES - Statement

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A New Day for Transparency in Child Protection

Jeffersontown, KY - Others will no doubt see the big story of today as the state's appeal to the Supreme Court around the release of child fatalities and near fatalities records. That is important, but let's face it – that is an old battle being waged to its bitter end.

The critical element of today's news is the Governor's Executive Order that establishes a [Child Fatality and Near Fatality External Review Panel](#) and that is a promising development for Kentucky's children and families. There are a myriad of details to be finalized from the formula for redaction to possible follow-up legislation in 2013 to specifics around report deadlines to data consistency. But the core certainty of today is that we have finally begun a march to bring accountability, transparency and effectiveness to a system of child protection that has let far too many children down.

There are several important elements of today's announcement that mirror national best practices. For example, the national experience confirms that the locus of control of these kinds of panels must guarantee autonomy. The facts that the Attorney General and key stakeholders will be appointing the members of and chair of the panel and that the Justice and Public Safety Cabinet will administer the process yield credibility to the effort.

Another element aligned with national best practices that the Governor's Executive Order addresses is the multi-disciplinary nature of the panel. Child fatalities and near fatalities are not simply the purview of the Cabinet. Instead, this is a community problem which must be solved by the broader community. A diverse review panel will ensure broad and informed perspectives are at the table. It is critical that this panel act as an independent voice on the issue. The membership and operating principles must intentionally honor the need for that kind of authentic independence.

Finally, the panel has the requisite double-vision lens in looking at cases. On one hand, individual cases will be a focus, which is a minimal ethical requirement to children who have died or nearly died from abuse. On the other hand, this review process – if implemented with fidelity – will be a key in systems' improvement. What is working and what isn't? When the panel answers those questions, then every Kentucky kid will more safe and more secure. In fact, we can get ahead of the tragedies that have beset the Commonwealth and we can focus on prevention rather than regret.

Kentucky Youth Advocates is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization. KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.

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