

New York State Citizen Review Panels

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Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

Sadly, in the past month two New York City children, Dahquay Gillians and Sierra Roberts, have suffered tragic deaths, allegedly from abuse at the hands of their parent(s). Both children and their families have had previous involvement with Administration for Children's Services (ACS). Their terrible deaths raise several questions for us all. Were their deaths preventable? Could ACS have done something differently?

Anytime a child dies when a report has been made to the New York State Central Register for Child Abuse and Maltreatment, a thorough investigation takes place to answer those very questions. Commissioner John Mattingly is leading that investigation and expects to make public a full report within the next two weeks. In addition, ACS will examine its practices related to the reunification of children with their biological parents after children have been in foster care and will identify means of strengthening its reunification program.

Unfortunately, some might suggest that these two children's tragic deaths are evidence of failure of the reforms implemented by Children's Services over the past decade. As co-chairs of the New York City Citizen's Review Panel, an appointed group of New York City citizens authorized by law to examine the policies and procedures with regard to Child Protective Services, we believe that these deaths are, in fact, further evidence of the urgent need to continue ACS's reforms in the system that is responsible for our most vulnerable children. These reforms have resulted in improved outcomes for our children. While there is no question that ACS must ensure the safety and success of our children, these incidents do not call for a dramatic policy shift. Rather, we support ACS's reforms, both those already under way and those planned for the near future. These reforms place an emphasis on increasing preventive services, improving family engagement, and reunifying thousands of children with their families.

We also hope to learn from the death of Dahquay and Sierra and help guide ACS to help other children to lead safe, productive lives. Commissioner Mattingly and ACS' response to these tragic deaths and the continued reform efforts are those which should be expected from an agency and leader committed to the success and safety of children.



David Lansner
Co-Chair, NYC Citizen Review Panel



Eric Brettschneider
Co-Chair, NYC Citizen Review Panel

Citizen Review Panels are mandated by federal law. In 1999 the New York Legislature passed S371-b of the Social Services Law establishing panels in New York State to evaluate the extent to which agencies are effectively discharging their child protection responsibilities in accordance with the State's Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) Plan, child protection standards set forth in the federal law, and any other criteria that the panel considers important to ensure the protection of children.