

The men and women at the Department feel deeply the loss of this young child. Such tragedies are rare among the tens of thousands of families and cases we serve, but nevertheless we are always working to prevent these types of heartbreaking events from occurring again. Despite being an isolated case, we hold ourselves to the highest standards. We believe that we can always learn and improve by carefully reviewing our work.

Accordingly, the Department immediately implemented a number of important changes when this tragedy occurred over a year ago. We appreciate the Child Advocate acknowledging these advancements in best practices in her report.

Specifically, implemented changes include the following:

- A more careful process has been implemented to assess what properly should be handled as a Family Assessment Response case for lower risk families;
- The Department has increased collaboration with community professionals who may possess important information to assess family safety;
- In 2014, the Department worked with the Center for the Study of Social Policy to develop a Practice Guide specific to infants, toddlers and young children and their families. This has resulted in the development of an early childhood framework that will be complete by the end of this year. It provides reference information related to child development, attachment, trauma and a specific section related to assessing safety/risk in children age zero to five that highlights risk factors that have been identified in national research as well as in Connecticut fatalities;
- Specific protocols have been developed for the Department's work with infants and toddlers;
- The assessment instruments used to identify safety issues have been improved to be more reflective of the Department's trauma-informed approach and practices as well as greater awareness of issues related to intimate partner violence, substance abuse and mental health. The assessment tools have also been improved to enhance reliability, validity, staff training and quality assurance.
- The Department was and remains committed to a robust evaluative component of its Differential Response System and as such entered into an agreement with the University of Connecticut's School of Social Work to serve as the researchers and evaluators. In the early stages of implementation, the focus was first on those cases referred to the Community Support for Families programs and last year expanded to include all cases initially assessed for a Family Assessment Response. A link to the initial UCONN study as posted on the DCF website is available here: http://www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/agency/pdf/far_data_82815.pdf
- In 2015, DCF has been working with its Information Systems and Office of Research and Evaluations teams in partnership with UCONN to examine and analyze additional data elements for enhanced evaluation that will include reviewing all intake cases. In addition the valuable data obtained from UCONN has also generated a series of inquiries resulting in UCONN conducting a further analysis of key outcomes to better understand the strengths within the system and opportunities for improvement;
- The Department's Region 6 has new leadership; and
- The Department is working with a nationally-known private social services organization, Eckerd, to implement a program of "predictive analytics" that uses data to identify families who present the greatest risk of a fatality for very young children.