



conference Dec. 13.

A key member of the Legislature yesterday endorsed the creation of a children's department.

"The Department of Human Services is a \$10 billion empire unto itself, with so many responsibilities, like Medical welfare," said Sen. Joseph Vitale, chairman of the Health and Senior Citizens Committee. "The commissioner and I try to do the best they

The report looked at 269 children in 124 families, who were randomly selected from the 1,241 families who entered the Division of Youth and Family Services system in the first three months of 2004 and stayed in it at least through late June. Some of those cases were opened as early as six months before the state's child welfare reform plan was introduced in June 2004.

The report found that in 29 percent of the cases studied, assessments of child safety were not done, potentially leaving children in harm's way. Only 12 percent of the families received all the services they required, and the division performed well for only 9.7 percent of the families.

"At the dawn of a new administration, we hope the stories of kids and families who have endured this system over the last two years will resonate in a way that directs political will and attention to their needs," said Kevin M. Ryan, the state's child advocate.

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**NJ DYFS Reform Glance** By The Associated Press 1/6/2006

Weak managers, poor services cited Posted by the Asbury Park Press on 01/7/06

BY TOM BALDWIN

GANNETT STATE BUREAU

TRENTON — New Jersey's troubled system for caring for children came under criticism Friday in two reports issued by the state Office of the Child Advocate.

One report, focusing on families under Division of Youth and Family Services supervision, said weak case managers led to spotty visits by case workers and that, in a few cases, children were unnecessarily removed from their homes.

A second, less harsh report said adolescents in foster care need more attention.

DYFS — which is under a federal court order to improve itself and is subject to a \$320 million reform plan — steps in when children are thought to be imperiled. It places children in foster care and arranges for adoptions, among other services.

The first report, studying 269 children in 124 families over 18 months from January 2004 to June 2005, said that "managers rarely complied with the minimum visitation requirement" and "supervisors provided minimal direction and oversight to case managers working directly with the family."

Department of Human Services spokesman Andy Williams, acknowledging the report was "for the most part" fair, said "A lot of the issues were things that we have been working on." Supervision? Absolutely, we are working on those things."

The report said families sometimes lacked a case worker and that "removal (of a child) may have been avoided" if existing home services had been made available.

Services such as family counseling, mental health treatment, parenting skills education and substance-abuse treatment were often not provided when needed, the report said.

The second study looked at 68 15-year-olds in out-of-home placement, saying that "transitional plans for adult independence were not regularly developed."

The report also said black 15-year-olds "were significantly less likely to receive mental-health services as their white counterparts."

Trauma appears high among the 15-year-olds, and case worker contact with these teenagers is inadequate, according to the second report.

Williams, the DYFS spokesman, said, "The one with the adolescents, I think, had a few things in there that were encouraging. . . . Adolescent services have seen pretty substantial improvement."

Criticism came swiftly, aimed primarily at the report on families.

Richard Wexler, executive director of the National Coalition for Child Protection Reform, said, the report "provided more evidence that every year hundreds, perhaps thousands of New Jersey children are needlessly torn from their loving and familiar, and thrown into a chaotic, often dangerous system of foster care — a system that, one recent national study found, churns out walking wounded four times out of five."

"DYFS knows exactly how to tear a family apart, but is clueless about how to keep one together," Wexler said. "In the Child Advocate's report makes clear that DYFS sets up families to fail."

Cecilia Zalkind, executive director of the Association for Children of New Jersey, said, "For years we have wondered

what happens to children under DYFS supervision. Now we know. Not much. These children and families bare visits from their case-workers, let alone relevant services that can prevent future abuse or neglect."

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Read the Reports at: <http://www.childadvocate.nj.gov/>

"knows all angles of the health care arena from that of a practicing physician to hospital administrator."

Corzine has already named four members of his cabinet, tapping Nina Mitchell Wells as secretary of state, Rona as public advocate, Lisa Jackson as environmental protection commissioner, and reappointing Maj. Gen. Glenn Rieth as adjutant general and head of Military and Veterans' Affairs.

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## Corzine names human services, health chiefs

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO Star-Ledger Staff January 10, 2006

Gov.-elect Jon Corzine nominated the state's first child advocate to run the \$10 billion Department of Human Services and the current health commissioner to retain his job, in his latest round of cabinet announcements yesterday.

Child Advocate Kevin M. Ryan of Fair Haven would be responsible for fixing the child protection system his office so frequently criticized. The department also runs the public welfare system, health insurance programs for the poor and institutions for the mentally ill and disabled.

A transition advisory group is expected to recommend that Corzine split up the mammoth department and spin off a separate cabinet-level children's agency.

Ryan has supported the idea in the past and said yesterday "structural change could be an important reform. ... I want to talk to the governor-elect about it."

Fred Jacobs, a physician and a lawyer from Short Hills, would remain as commissioner for Health and Senior Services, continuing an appointment Gov. Richard Codey made 14 months ago.

Both nominations must be approved by the Senate. Commissioners earn \$141,000 a year.

Ryan would replace James Davy, whom former Gov. James E. McGreevey appointed two years ago to overhaul the child welfare system after the state settled a class-action lawsuit on behalf of foster children.

Davy launched a \$320 million DYFS reform effort in 2004, but a court panel monitoring the state's work found "seriously inadequate progress" last year. Children's Rights, Inc., the national advocacy group that filed the lawsuit, asked a federal judge to take control of the reform and put it directly in Corzine's hands.

Susan Lambiasi of Children's Rights praised Corzine's appointment of a "passionate" child advocate, but said her organization "will not put the litigation on hold. Appointing a new commissioner is a first step but not the only step," she said.

Among his immediate goals, Ryan said he wants to extend health coverage to uninsured children, reorganize the adoption system that is "in a state of disrepair," and improve health services for foster children.

Former DYFS Director Edward E. Cotton, whose work was often the target of Ryan's criticism, credited Ryan for his focus and intensity. "We have had agreements and disagreements, but I do think he was always focused on what is best for the kids. Child welfare in New Jersey really needs that."

"He is certainly aware of all the problems, and now he's got the difficult job of fixing them. That's much harder. He's got a big challenge," Cotton added.

Cecilia Zalkind, executive director of the advocacy group, the Association for Children of New Jersey, said Ryan's 20 years of experience examining the plight of children under DYFS care has seasoned him. "A big advantage is he



Susan Lambiasè, associate director of Children's Rights, praised the nomination of Mr. Ryan. "Governor-elect Corzine is sending a clear message that child welfare is a priority for his administration, which it should be, given where we are," she said.

State Senator Joseph F. Vitale, chairman of the Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee, called Ryan's nomination an excellent choice. "Few people understand the complexities of what is necessary for meaningful reform," he said. "There's no better advocate in the State of New Jersey."

The state's efforts to overhaul its child protection system have been criticized for focusing more on bureaucracy than the work of caseworkers and their supervisors.

Hetty Rosenstein, president of Local 1037 of the Communications Workers of America, which represents many of the state's social workers, said Mr. Ryan had the skills to address that concern. "He's a person who's been in the trenches and he knows what it's like," she said. "He will put a lot of emphasis on what's happening on the front lines, and he will support the front lines to make sure they do the work."

Cecelia Zalkind, executive director of the Association for Children of New Jersey, another advocacy group, said: "I don't think the lawsuit has unfortunately gotten polarized, and people are in what seem to be very extreme positions. I think Kevin is a very good choice to get reform back on track."

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## Corzine picks DYFS watchdog to lead state's human services

Critics of the agency praised the selection of Kevin Ryan, who has headed the Office of the Child Advocate since 2004.  
By Jennifer Moroz Inquirer Tribune Bureau Jan. 10, 2006

TRENTON - For the last two years, Kevin Ryan has critiqued the state's progress in overhauling its troubled Division of Youth and Family Services.

Now Gov.-elect Jon S. Corzine wants to put Ryan, director of New Jersey's independent Office of the Child Advocate, in charge of fixing the child-welfare agency.

Corzine yesterday nominated Ryan to head the Department of Human Services. The department includes DYFS and is in the midst of court-monitored efforts to improve conditions for the tens of thousands of children in its care. DYFS has more than 20,000 employees and serves more than one million residents.

Ryan's appointment, which needs Senate confirmation, drew applause from child advocates who argue that changes in child welfare have come too slowly.

"We look forward to working with him," said Susan Lambiasè, associate director of Children's Rights Inc., the Manhattan organization whose 1999 lawsuit forced the child-welfare overhaul. "Kevin Ryan obviously brings a lot to the table, having dedicated his life to child-welfare issues and making lives better for kids."

Hetty Rosenstein, president of a union that represents DYFS caseworkers, called Ryan a "great choice."

"He's smart, he knows what he's doing, and he's creative," she said. "He'll care about [workers on] the front line and he'll care about the families."

In addition to DYFS, the human-services commissioner oversees six psychiatric hospitals, seven centers for people with developmental disabilities, three residential treatment centers for children, and social benefits.

Ryan, 39, a married father of six from Fair Haven, has built his career on working with at-risk kids. He graduated







"They've spent a ton of money on setting up these bureaucratic structures that have nothing to do with keeping safe," Rosenstein said.

Ryan agreed that meaningful change did not happen just in the office but also in the field, which he described as being in "chaos." He vowed not only to continue adding caseworkers but to be in better communication with the front line to "clarify the roles and expectations of the workforce."

He also announced the position of an ombudsman to respond to citizen concerns and complaints.

To help him accomplish his goals, Ryan is assembling a management team that includes child advocates from around the country and members of his former staff. All will report directly to him, he said, adding, "I want to get my hands directly around this reform effort."

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## Advocates delay request for a takeover of DYFS

Agency has 120 days to get reforms on track

BY SUSAN K. LIVIO      Star-Ledger Staff      January 26, 2006

The national advocacy group that asked a federal judge to take control of New Jersey's beleaguered child welfare system has agreed to put that request on hold for 120 days to give the new Human Services commissioner a chance to get reforms on track.

Children's Rights Inc. said it will meet periodically over the four-month period with acting Human Services Commissioner Kevin M. Ryan to determine whether he has assembled a management team and a strategy that focuses on about real improvements.

The agreement reached Tuesday postpones an effort by Children's Rights to convince U.S. District Court Judge Robert R. Chesler that a federal takeover was needed because state officials were incapable of fixing problems at the Department of Youth and Family Services.

The advocacy group made that request in a motion filed in November. It accused the state of failing to live up to its commitment, under the 2003 settlement of a class-action lawsuit, to vastly improve children's services.

"We have broken the logjam to suspend the litigation for a federal takeover of our child welfare system," Ryan said at a news conference in Trenton, his first since taking office Jan. 17. "This signals a significant measure of trust among us and confidence in each other that if work together, we can get this reform on track and make this system better for children and families across the state."

The state dedicated \$320 million over the last two years to the DYFS overhaul. But a panel of experts monitoring the effort for the court concluded in October that New Jersey had made "seriously inadequate progress" in areas such as finding enough foster homes and reducing worker caseloads.

In his previous post as Child Advocate, Ryan often publicly criticized the pace of DYFS reform. Having Ryan now in the commissioner's chair persuaded Children's Rights to back off, at least temporarily, said Susan K. Livio, the group's associate director.

"He's got a proven track record in child welfare issues. He knows what the problems are. We are taking a leap of faith right now, but we think it's the right thing to do," Ambias said.

Children's Rights reserves the right to go back to court if Ryan's team does not produce an effective strategy to implement the reform, according to the agreement.

"What we would like to see is movement on the most important issues -- investigations, training, reducing case the things the Office of the Child Advocate diagnosed as being seriously in disarray," he said.

Ryan insisted, however, that a federal takeover "will not happen on my watch."

The deal was brokered by the expert panel, which under the agreement will continue monitoring the state's progress on behalf of the federal court throughout the 120-day period. The panel was supposed to expire in December.

"We are very pleased that the parties have agreed to set aside their differences for 120 days and work together to strengthen the reform effort," said Steven D. Cohen, panel chairman.

During this period, Ryan also will have to decide whether a new department of children's services should be created, separating it from the rest of Human Services -- which also runs state institutions for the mentally retarded and the physically ill, the public welfare program and Medicaid.

It's an idea Children's Rights favors and that Ryan and Gov. Corzine have said deserves consideration.

Ryan yesterday also introduced key members of his management team and announced the creation of a department ombudsman to respond to citizens' complaints.

Ryan tapped Lisa Eisenbud as his chief of staff. Eisenbud was the director of the Child Advocate's effort to monitor the child welfare reform plan, and was a principal author of the plan in 2004 under then-Commissioner James Davy.

Jennifer Velez, Ryan's first assistant at the Child's Advocate's Office, was named deputy commissioner in charge of child welfare and Medicaid. Ryan also named Molly Armstrong as director of policy and planning. She had previously worked in the Louisiana juvenile justice system, and at a nonprofit in New York that helped implement child welfare reform.

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## NEEDED: A single entity for all child-welfare agencies

FIELD-LEVEL OPERATIONS: Require attention now

Report: DYFS must have higher priority

BY LAUREN O. KIDD Asbury Park Press 01/28/06 GANNETT STATE BUREAU

TRENTON — Officials must provide "immediate attention" to field-level operations while discussing a long-term plan to restructure New Jersey's child-welfare system, according to a report released Friday by a group advising Gov. Corzine's transition team.

"Child and family services need an ongoing, visible, institutionalized voice at the highest level of government that will be a single accountable entity with the appropriate span of authority and responsibility," the report states.

The report stops short of explicitly recommending a new department but says the existing structure should focus on children, youth and families. Juvenile justice issues would be transferred to the department.

"I think there was a sense that children's services needed to be a greater priority and that a new department might ensure that that happens," said Cynthia Zalkin, executive director of the Association for Children in New Jersey, a co-chairwoman of the group.

"It's hard to know which part breaks away, but you end up with a department that is about children and family services as opposed to what is there now," said group member Robert Rosenstein, president of Communications Workers of

America Local 1037, which represents Division of Youth and Family Service workers.

Zalkind said the team had "a lot of concern about the fact that the field continues to be in crisis, in chaos."

The report recommends improving adoption services and staff training, reassessing the behavioral health system and ensuring financial support for kin who take children in during out-of-home placement.

The report stresses the importance of keeping families from requiring DYFS intervention in the first place.

"Prevention must be a priority," it says. "This requires the resources to ensure the development of long-term effective prevention efforts that strengthen children and families."

Other points made include ensuring strong monitoring of the reform plan, improving data collection and accountability and developing an overall family policy for New Jersey.

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The acting commissioner also said he is unsettled by what the revelation says about the agency long after the court-ordered reform began. But disclosures like these are needed to fix the lingering problem, Ryan said.

"This is what I want the staff to be doing. Without any fear of retribution from management, tell us where the holes in the safety net are," he said.