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Commissioner's Message - Safety Workgroup

Body

Dear Colleagues,

The Pennsville incident continues to weigh on our minds. While our colleagues thankfully escaped serious injury, the event was traumatic for not only for them, but our entire department, too.

Assistant Commissioner Lisa von Pier, Chief of Staff Suzanne Alvino, and I met with our Salem local office last Wednesday to support our staff and express our respect and admiration for their work to improve the lives of Salem area children and families. We are grateful to them for sharing their concerns, ideas, and suggestions.

You have often heard me say DCF is a learning organization, continuously evaluating our work and adopting new policies and procedures for maximum effectiveness and efficiency. This applies to the safety of our colleagues, too.

Last year, we created the Safety Workgroup to review and evaluate our local office and field safety policies and procedures and offer recommendations. This diverse workgroup included not only department leadership, but also field staff throughout the state. The workgroup made several recommendations, including offering voluntary self-defense courses designed for social workers and emergency alert devices.

I have asked the Safety Workgroup, now chaired by Chief of Staff Alvino and Assistant Director of Child Protection and Permanency Nancy Carré-Lee, to again meet to consider more ways to make our work safer. The workgroup will focus on several areas, including:

1. Technology to assist caseworkers in the field, including enhancements to state vehicles and/or providing smart phones to field staff;
2. Clarifying department policy regarding police escorts, buddies, and MACE, and when client meetings may be cancelled or precluded due to safety concerns; and
3. Physical safety devices to enhance safety in the field.

The Safety Workgroup will convene soon, and I will update you not long after their work is complete.

Warm regards,

Allison Blake, PhD LSW
Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Children and Families

8/24/2015

Last modified at 7/24/2015 11:24 AM by DCF