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Ombudsman Finds Inadequate CPS Child Abuse Investigations and Interventions Following Independent Case Review of Justice and Raiden Robinson Fatalities and Calls for Improvements.

TUKWILA – The Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman (OFCO) today released its independent review of Child Protective Services' (CPS) response to concerns about the safety and welfare of the Robinson children. Mary Meinig, Director Ombudsman of OFCO, criticized the actions of CPS stating, "The agency failed to adequately investigate referrals it received on the Robinson children despite numerous opportunities to do so. If they had properly investigated the referrals on a timely basis, the outcome for these children may well have been different." The report recommends changes in state laws and policies that would improve the quality of child abuse investigations and interventions by CPS.

In November 2004, police officers found sixteen month old Justice Robinson and six week old Raiden Robinson dead in their home from malnutrition and dehydration despite food in the refrigerator and pantry. Between 2002 and 2004, CPS received six referrals reporting alcohol abuse by Ms. Robinson and related physical neglect of her children.

The Ombudsman's made key findings in its review. Among these were that CPS accepted only two out of the six referrals it received from concerned citizens for investigation. Of the two accepted: 1) CPS failed to adequately investigate an October 2003 allegation of child neglect; and 2) failed to complete the investigation of a February 2004 report alleging child neglect related to the mother's alcohol abuse. That investigation was still pending at the time of the children's death, 9 months after the report had been received.

"Chronic neglect continues to be largely ignored by our state child welfare system. The Ombudsman has been calling for legal reform of the neglect laws since 1997. Amending the law to recognize that harm can result from a pattern of neglect, as the Robinson children were subjected to, would make it easier for CPS to intervene with families," said Ombudsman Meinig. The legislature is currently considering a bill that would address this issue. In addition to calling for changes in the law governing CPS investigations and interventions, the Ombudsman's report recommends:

- Improving supervisory reviews of CPS investigations;
- Implementing caseload standards for CPS workers and supervisors; and
- Requiring CPS to attempt to obtain mental health evaluations of a parent when mental health issues contribute to the alleged child abuse or neglect.

"These recommendations will improve the quality of CPS investigations, help to accurately assess a family's need, and effectively engage parents with appropriate services. It is reasonable for individuals reporting concerns of child abuse or neglect, the parents and children who are the subject of these referrals, and society at large to expect that CPS investigations will be conducted in a thorough, professional manner consistent with state law, department policy and recognized best practices. CPS must effectively intervene to protect children and strengthen families," stated Ombudsman Meinig.

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Contact: Justice and Raiden Robinson Fatalities Review: Report of the Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman may be obtained by contacting OFCO at 800-571-7321 or by accessing OFCO's web site at: <http://www.governor.wa.gov/ofco>.