

STATE'S CHILD ADVOCATE RELEASES REPORT REGARDING HANDLING OF ALLEGATIONS AGAINST FORMER SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR; REPORT ALSO EXAMINES SCHOOL DISTRICT'S POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Mayor, Schools Superintendent say the report is a "scathing indictment of a system that needs to be overhauled immediately."

HARTFORD, CONN (Feb. 10, 2017) – Sarah Eagan, the State's Child Advocate, today released a report that is the product of a nine-month review of the policy, procedures and practices of the Hartford Public Schools (HPS) District with regard to mandated reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect. The report was conducted at the request of Mayor Luke Bronin, following the arrest of a high-ranking HPS administrator, Eduardo Genao, for felony Risk of Injury to a child, and after public concerns were reported regarding HPS' executive/s possible knowledge of a prior reported concern about a "director" employed by HPS engaged in "inappropriate contact" with a child. Mayor Bronin asked the State's Child Advocate (OCA) to become involved in the matter when details of the allegations first came to light in April 2016.

In addition to a review of the specific allegations against Mr. Genao, Mayor Bronin asked Child Advocate Eagan to undertake a comprehensive review of the policies, procedures and practices of the Hartford Public School District regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse or neglect, as well as its policies and practices regarding compliance with federal Title IX obligations.

"This report reveals a decade-long failure to protect children in our schools, and the Board of Education and District leaders must take immediate, aggressive steps to fix it," said Mayor Luke Bronin. "This is about kids' safety and wellbeing, and I'm outraged at the level of dysfunction and lack of accountability that has apparently existed for many years. I'm grateful to the Child Advocate for agreeing to conduct this review, and I've made clear to District leaders that this needs to be priority number one."

Hartford's Acting Superintendent, Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez also expressed anger and disappointment over the findings of the Child Advocate, describing it as "an urgent call to action for the Hartford Public Schools to make fundamental changes."

According to Attorney Eagan, key findings from the report—developed after extensive review of District and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) child welfare records, as well as interviews with a number of individuals with knowledge of District practices, include:

- 1) The school District did not regularly review and update its mandated reporting policy as legally required;
- 2) Training of mandated reporters was inadequate;
- 3) Mandated reporters sometimes failed to make reports concerning suspicion that school employees have neglected or abused a child;
- 4) DCF did not have a system in place to efficiently document, track and address either the failure to make mandated reports or delays in mandated reporting;
- 5) School employees who engaged in misconduct were not effectively held accountable; and,
- 6) There exists a special vulnerability for children with disabilities to possible abuse or neglect.

The full report can be found on OCA websites at <http://www.ct.gov/oca/site/default.asp>

“I deeply appreciate that Mayor Bronin invited the OCA—an independent watchdog agency—to review the District’s compliance with state laws regarding mandated reporting of child abuse and neglect. OCA’s findings regarding the District’s historical non-compliance and haphazard attention to state laws intended to protect children are grave and deeply disturbing. That these problems persisted in the wake of a 2010 joint report by the OCA and Attorney General’s Office should serve as a call to action for every school District to examine its practices with regard to child safety. The willingness of city and District leaders to examine these findings and create a comprehensive action plan on behalf of children and families is a critical first step towards improving the safety net for students and I encourage all school Districts to ensure their mandatory reporting policies, but most importantly, actual practices on behalf of children, are reliable and effective. OCA is committed to assisting the city in its efforts moving ahead, emphasizing that all efforts must prioritize independent review, transparency, accountability and partnership with the families.”

To that end, Acting School Superintendent Torres-Rodriguez has conferred with the Child Advocate and has prepared a draft action plan to present to the Board of Education for its consideration and action. Dr. Torres-Rodriguez vowed to work closely with the Board of Education and the Administration to “comprehensively and quickly fix” the failings in the system identified by the Child Advocate’s report.

“Today we are announcing a series of steps we will begin taking immediately to correct the problems the Child Advocate uncovered in her review as well as a comprehensive draft action plan for the Board’s review and adoption,” said Dr. Torres-Rodriguez. “I want to thank the Child Advocate for the work she and her staff have done; she’s provided a roadmap for us to follow as the Board of Education and the Administration work together to overhaul this system to protect the children in our schools.”

The Draft Action Plan can be found here: <http://www.hartfordschools.org/ActionPlan>

“I want every relative of every schoolchild in Hartford to know that I will not rest until this system is fixed,” vowed Dr. Torres-Rodriguez.

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